

**GOOD PRACTICE IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION:  
PRACTITIONERS' PERSPECTIVES**

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A thesis submitted to the University of Newcastle in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

November 2006

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# **GOOD PRACTICE IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION: PRACTITIONERS' PERSPECTIVES**

**OMAYYA M. M. AL-HASSAN**

## **ABSTRACT**

Early childhood education has recently been recognised in the political and educational agenda in England. This has been demonstrated by the introduction of the Foundation Stage as a distinct stage of education. The Foundation Stage was implemented in schools in 2000 and became a statutory stage of the National Curriculum for England in 2002. This research study has explored practitioners' perspectives on good practice in the Foundation Stage and what impacts on it. It has sought the views of those who work directly with children in order to get a deeper understanding of their practice.

Methodologically, an inductive approach was adopted by the use of grounded theory and in-depth interviewing. Using theoretical sampling, in-depth interviews with twenty-one practitioners (twelve teachers and nine nursery nurses) were undertaken, transcribed and analysed. The analysis of the data was facilitated by the use of NUD\*IST (Non-numerical Unstructured Data: Indexing, Searching and Theorising) software. Six major features of good practice in the Foundation Stage emerged from the data: integrated, play-based and child-centred curriculum that places emphasis on personal, social and emotional development, effective early childhood environment, good interpersonal relationships between all parties, qualified specialised staff, ongoing observation and assessment of children, and evaluation of staff. Six main factors were revealed to be important in enhancing/supporting good practice in the Foundation Stage: training, resources, positive government intervention, parents' cooperation, practitioners' feelings towards the job, and practitioners' personal qualities. Moreover, it was found that practitioners face the following difficulties in their work: workload and time constraints, lack of resources, negative government intervention, children with English as an additional language, social deprivation and poverty, the low status of early childhood education and the situation of nursery nurses.

In the light of the research findings, it is recommended that further steps should be taken to promote the status of early childhood education and its practitioners and that further research should be undertaken into the Foundation Stage. It is also suggested that the difficulties faced by practitioners should be addressed in order to improve educational practice in the early childhood provision and help practitioners effectively support and promote children's learning and development. In this respect it would be particularly important to involve practitioners in order to give them ownership of the process.

*Dedication*

*To my late father and my mother  
without whose warmth and support  
I would not have reached this stage  
of academic achievement.*

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to express my immense gratitude to those who provided me with help and support throughout this research study. At the beginning I would like to thank my supervisors, Professor Steven Higgins and Dr David Mercer, to whom I am deeply grateful for their support, advice and kindness. Our discussions and their suggestions were very helpful and encouraging.

The study could not have taken place without the generosity of the teachers and the nursery nurses to whom I feel greatly indebted as they freely gave me of their time despite all their commitments. I would also like to thank the head teachers and administrators of their schools for their cooperation.

I would also like to express my sincere thanks to Mrs Elaine Hall for her help and support whenever I needed them, and to Mrs Linda Kelly in the Library of Newcastle University for her help and cooperation.

Moreover, it certainly gives me pleasure to thank the Hashemite University in Jordan for giving me the opportunity to pursue my doctoral study in the United Kingdom. Finally, my deepest heartfelt thanks are for my family for their support, warmth and encouragement.



## DECLARATION

**UNIVERSITY OF NEWCASTLE  
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION, COMMUNICATION AND  
LANGUAGE SCIENCES**

I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been identified and that no material is included which has been submitted for any other award or qualification.

Signed: *O. M. Al-Hassan*

Dated: *25/11/2006*

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# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1. Introduction**

This thesis details the research study that I have undertaken to investigate practitioners' perspectives on good practice in the Foundation Stage (FS) of early childhood education (ECE). In this chapter I shed some light on the research background, explaining the rationale behind embarking on this research effort. Then I discuss the importance of the study supporting this with some research evidence. After that I throw some light on the purpose of the research and the approach I have adopted in doing the study. Finally, I provide an outline of the thesis, showing how it is organised in the six chapters which make it up.

### **1.2. From Jordan to England<sup>1</sup>: Distance and Relevance**

As a country with very limited natural resources, Jordan recognises that the development of human resources is a priority to build a competitive advantage in the global knowledge economy and to shift Jordan to the status of an advanced country. For this purpose, education is considered a priority investment in Jordan. Realising the importance of the educational system in developing a skilful, qualified labour force, the Jordanian government pays considerable attention to the development of that system to face the technological, economic and social challenges of the 21st century and to meet the needs of the labour market. The Jordanian Ministry of Education (MOE) has planned and

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<sup>1</sup> Because the Foundation Stage which I have investigated in this research study is a statutory stage of the National Curriculum for England only, I will use 'England' in most cases. However when the context is not unique to England, I will use 'Britain' or 'the United Kingdom (UK)'.

undertaken, and is still undertaking, reform programmes to transform the traditional educational system that relies on rote-learning pedagogy to a system that promotes higher-level thinking and problem-solving skills. In the past, however, ECE was nearly absent from the concerns of the MOE as it was not directly involved in providing education for children aged under six years. The statutory school education begins at the age of six when children join grade 1 of basic education. In past years, pre-school education, which is usually referred to as ECE, was provided by the private sector, and the role of the MOE was limited to licensing and inspection. As a result, ECE was not provided in all areas and it was not available for poor households because of its cost.

Recently, the MOE has recognised the importance of ECE in fostering life-long learning and improving school achievement especially of children from disadvantaged backgrounds. In 2002, ECE was placed firmly on the agenda of the MOE as it considered providing equal opportunities for all children in early childhood as one of its strategic objectives (MOE, 2002). In the most recent educational reform programme, Education Reform for Knowledge Economy I Program (ERFKEI), which started in 2003 and will continue until 2008, the fourth component is concerned with ECE:

Component 4 is designed to enhance equity through public provision to KG II [kindergartens level 2] to low-income areas. MOE will initially develop a program to phase in KG II for children at age 5, to be followed by KG I at the end of ERFKEI. This component has four sub-components: (i) an enhanced institutional capacity for ECE; (ii) a cadre of early childhood educators; (iii) increased access to KGs for the poor, and (iv) parent and community participation and partnership (World Bank, 2003: 9).

The MOE has become directly involved in ECE and has started providing kindergartens in its schools, initially targeting the disadvantaged populations. The gradual expansion of pre-school provision which is currently taking place and will continue in the coming



years has resulted in a need for qualified teachers who are specialised in ECE. In the past, Jordanian universities were not interested in offering separate specialised programmes in ECE. To meet the needs of Jordanian society and to provide the MOE with qualified ECE specialists, some universities have started establishing and developing ECE degree programmes. One of the big universities in Jordan is the Hashemite University which has developed two programmes, one in ECE and one in early childhood care, initially to award a first degree in these specialisations. In the Hashemite University, as in other Jordanian universities, there is lack of specialists in ECE. For that reason the Hashemite University sent me to the United Kingdom (UK) to qualify at doctoral level in this field and garner ideas about the English expertise in early years provision.

The decision makers in the Hashemite University did not decide the place of my doctoral research study, neither did they restrict me to any specific research topic. They gave me the freedom to decide the topic and the place, Jordan or England. For me, freedom does not mean making easy choices. On the contrary, the more freedom I am given, the more responsible I feel. It is freedom with challenge and responsibility. After much thought, I made my choice. England was to be the research place and early years practitioners' perspectives on their practice was to be the research topic. Concerning the place, researching in Jordan would have been easier for me for the following reasons. Firstly, having worked in the MOE before moving to higher education I was very familiar with the educational system and the situations in educational directorates and schools. Secondly, the Hashemite University and the MOE would have facilitated doing the fieldwork and having access to any educational institution. The MOE would also have provided me with any relevant information, statistics and materials I might have needed.

Thirdly, I would have been living in a warm atmosphere with my family having their direct support instead of having it via telephone calls and e-mail messages. Yet, I have chosen to research in England rather than in Jordan because this would enable me to get a better understanding of the English pre-school provision and especially the new developments taking place in England. Moreover, being in England would allow me access to more publications than would have been available in Jordan at this stage. As for the research topic, the rationale behind investigating early years practitioners' views about good practice will become clear in the next section which explains the importance of the study. To sum up, the reason behind conducting this study in England is to have an understanding of its recent pre-school provision in order to benefit my work in Jordan.

### **1.3. Importance of the Study**

This research study is an attempt to explore practitioners' perspectives on good practice in ECE. Its importance stems from two points. Firstly, early childhood is a very important stage in children's lives and learning as it makes a significant contribution to their physical, cognitive, personal, social, emotional, spiritual and ethical development and it lays the foundation for their future learning and lives. Secondly, the practitioners who work in early childhood settings are the most influential people on children as they are the ones who deal directly with them and spend a considerable time with them. In short, the importance of the study stems from the importance of ECE and the importance of the practitioners' role.

The importance of ECE has been recognised in philosophical assumptions, religious beliefs and psychological theories. In the ancient times for instance, Aristotle and Plato

referred to the importance of ECE in their philosophies (Simmons et al., 1980; Cannella, 1997). In the 7th century, the Islamic religion emphasised children's rights with regard to having good care and education, and Muslim philosophers such as Ibn-Sina (980-1037), Al-Ghazali (1058-1111) and Ibn-Khaldun (1332-1406) discussed the importance of ECE and suggested some principles for supporting children's development (Al-Khawaldeh, 2003). Martin Luther (1483-1546) stressed that all children should learn in order to read the Bible, and John Comenius (1592-1670), a minister of the church, emphasised the mothers' role in children's education. Rousseau (1712-1778) described childhood as a unique period in life, and Pestalozzi (1746-1827) recommended that schools should include the qualities of a good home (Austin, 1976; Simmons et al., 1980; Cannella, 1997). In the field of psychology which has had a very considerable contribution to the ECE field, many psychologists such as Piaget, Freud and Bowlby placed emphasis on early childhood as it impacts on children's future lives (David, 1998). Bloom (cited in Austin, 1976:1) indicated that most of the person's intellectual development takes place in early childhood, stating that 'in terms of intelligence measured at age 17, about 50% of the development takes place between conception and age 4, about 30% between ages 4 and 8, and about 20% between the ages of 8 and 17'. Goleman (1995: 226) described childhood as 'a crucial window of opportunity for shaping lifelong emotional propensities' arguing that 'habits acquired in childhood become set in the basic synaptic wiring of neural architecture, and are harder to change later in life'. All these are just examples to illustrate the significance of the education offered to children in their early years.



The second point that explains the importance of this study is its exploration of practitioners' views about good practice. Since practitioners are the people who work directly with children, their role is influential and their perspectives on educational practice and any relevant changes or innovations should be taken into account. In his discussion of the problem of good educational practice, Alexander (1992: 89) explains that the assumption that policy makers are 'the sole definer, arbiter and guardian of good practice must be abandoned'. He suggests that more consideration should be given to practitioners because practice cannot exist independently from their personalities, preferences and intentions. He also suggests that practitioners' day-to-day problems and dilemmas must be taken into account in any discussion of educational practice. Furthermore, in their report of some of the findings of comparative case studies conducted in ten countries to investigate teacher quality, school quality and educational policies, Hopkins and Stern (1996: 501) suggest that 'Teachers are at the heart of educational improvement' and educational policies and improvements are not effective and children do not get their benefits without teachers.

In this regard, I think that educational policies, resources, facilities, school environment and parental involvement are undoubtedly important factors in any educational provision. Yet, what practitioners do with these factors and how they deal with them and employ them for the benefit of children are more important because, in the end, practitioners with their beliefs, values, intentions, qualities and competencies are crucial for the success of the provision. Therefore, practitioners should be involved and their voices should be heard and taken into consideration seriously in any educational change or innovation as



well as in teacher training programmes. According to Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1990) (cited in Keyes, 2000: 4),

Efforts to construct a knowledge base for teaching have relied primarily on university-based research and ignored the significant contributions that teacher knowledge can make. As a consequence those most directly responsible for the education of children have been disenfranchised ... In other words, 'What's missing from the knowledge base for teaching ... are the voices of the teachers themselves'.

In brief, practitioners' understandings, work experience and, using Feldman's (1997: 769) words, their 'varieties of wisdom' can inform training programmes and educational policies and contribute to the knowledge base of education and educational practice. This study is but an attempt to hear the voices of a number of early years practitioners and, hopefully, let them be heard by others.

#### **1.4. Research Purpose and Approach**

The purpose of this study has been to investigate practitioners' perspectives on good practice in the Foundation Stage (FS) and what impacts on it. I sought the views of those working directly with children in the early years to get an understanding of their own practice and what they think of it. The FS, as will be explained in detail in the second chapter of this thesis, is the provision offered to children aged 3 to 5 years. It was introduced as a distinct stage of children's education in England in 1999 (QCA/DfEE, 1999), implemented in schools in 2000 (QCA/DfEE, 2000) and then became a statutory stage of the National Curriculum for England (QCA/DfES, 2003).

To achieve my research purpose, I advocated an inductivist approach by the use of in-depth interviewing and grounded theory (GT). Using a GT approach, I did not want to

start my study with any preconceived assumptions or conceptions about practitioners' practice in the FS. Therefore, I did not begin the research with any hypotheses or specific set of questions. I purposefully started with this relatively open and broad question: 'How do practitioners view good practice in the Foundation Stage?' Then narrower research questions evolved during the joint processes of data gathering and analysis and were based on the concepts and categories that emerged from the analysis of the interviews. These processes, and how the questions were formed, will be discussed in detail in the third chapter of this thesis.

## **1.5. Thesis Organisation**

This thesis comprises six chapters. This is the first chapter which is an introductory one that throws some light on the research background, importance, purpose and approach. The second chapter reviews some research evidence that has relevance to the research topic. More specifically, it firstly gives an idea about the research on teacher thinking focusing on early childhood practitioners and FS practitioners in particular. Then it sheds the light on the problem of good educational practice and its meaning in general and good practice and practitioners' role in ECE in particular. Finally, it focuses on ECE in the English context where the study was undertaken, providing an overview of the early years provision in England and giving an idea about the FS, its importance, aims and good practice in it. The third chapter discusses the methodological approach employed in the study and the means and procedures of data collection and analysis. The philosophical underpinnings, main features, merits and limitations of the in-depth interview and GT are presented. Detailed explanation of the theoretical sampling and the procedures of data gathering and analysis are provided. Moreover, the problematic issues of validity,

reliability and generalisability associated with qualitative research are considered. Finally, the issue of the quantification of qualitative data is discussed and a justification for the abandonment of any kind of quantification in this study is given. In practice, the approach adopted proved adequate to the purpose of the research.

In the fourth and the fifth chapters, the research findings are brought forth and discussed with numerous illustrative extracts from the interviews. At the beginning of the fourth chapter, the light is thrown on how the findings of qualitative research in general and GT studies in particular can be presented in writing. Then the first major theme, *Features of Good Practice*, with its categories and subcategories is presented and discussed using integrative diagrams and narrative style. In the fifth chapter, the second and the third main themes, *Enhancing/Supportive Factors* and *Difficulties* are brought forth and discussed in the same style. In both chapters the study findings are discussed in relation to the relevant research evidence. The final chapter is a concluding one in which the main findings are summarised, some comments on them are made and the limitations of the study are discussed. The novel aspects in the study and its contribution to the educational field in general and the field of ECE in particular are also highlighted. Furthermore, on the basis of the research results, some recommendations are made. Finally, some final thoughts and insights concerning how this study can be of benefit in Jordan are discussed.



## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

... practice can only be fully understood if one engages with the thinking that underlies it ... Practice is not just observable, codable and measurable behaviours but an array of ideas, values and intentions; and, in action, diagnoses, decisions and judgments. Practice is thought and thought is practice (Alexander, 1988: 178).

#### **2.1. Introduction**

The purpose of this study has been to investigate practitioners' perspectives on good practice in the Foundation Stage (FS). In the first chapter I gave an idea about the research background, importance, purpose and approach. In this chapter I try to provide a review of the literature related to the areas this research study is concerned with. I will firstly review some research evidence on teacher thinking, focusing on the studies that have dealt with the perspectives of early childhood education (ECE) practitioners in general and the FS practitioners in particular. Secondly, I will try to shed some light on how good educational practice is conceptualised in education in general and in ECE in particular as perceived and reported by the authors who have addressed this issue. Finally, my focus will be shifted to the English context where this study has taken place. I will give an overview of early childhood provision in England and throw some light on the FS in terms of its importance, aims and good practice in it.

The reasons behind reviewing research evidence in these three areas are as follows. Concerning the first area, since this research study addresses practitioners' thinking about educational practice, it is necessary to have an idea about research on teacher thinking: its purposes, its language and some of the topics that have been tackled by researchers. As for the second area, in this study I have intended to understand and explain good



educational practice in early childhood from the practitioners' point of view. Therefore, it is important to clarify how good educational practice is theorised in education generally and in ECE particularly. The third area is, without doubt, essential to include as it provides information about the context in which this study has been undertaken.

## **2.2. Research Evidence on Teacher Thinking**

In this section I do not intend to provide an exhaustive review of research on teacher thinking. The writings of some researchers (e.g. Clark and Peterson, 1986; Ben-Peretz et al., 1986; Day et al., 1993) provide a rich source of literature on teacher thinking. Rather, my intention is to review some of the research on teacher thinking with a focus on the studies that have addressed teacher perspectives and beliefs in the field of ECE in order to maintain focus on early years practitioners.

In the last three decades there has been a notable increase in research on teacher thinking (e.g. Clark and Peterson, 1986; Pajares, 1992; Calderhead, 1993; Day, 1993; Pope, 1993; Feldman, 1997; Tirri et al., 1999; Higgins and Moseley, 2001; Tsai, 2002; Day et al., 2006). Hunt (1987) (cited in Pope, 1993: 23) suggests that this increase demonstrates the realisation of the value of 'teachers' experienced knowledge'. Believing that teacher behaviour and practice are 'substantially influenced and even determined' by their thought processes, Clark and Peterson (1986: 255) state:

The ultimate goal of research on teachers' thought processes is to construct a portrayal of the cognitive psychology of teaching for use by educational theorists, researchers, policymakers, curriculum designers, teacher educators, school administrators, and by teachers themselves.

Based on their extensive review of research into teacher thinking, Clark and Peterson have conceptualised teachers' thought processes in three main categories: planning, interactive thoughts and decisions, and teachers' theories and beliefs. Calderhead (1993) thinks that the major reason of research on teacher thinking is the concern about teacher professional development and the quality of teacher education. Higgins and Moseley (2001) suggest that teachers' thinking and beliefs have a vital role in their classroom practices, pointing out that considering teachers' beliefs and practices is essential in supporting educational change and promoting professional development. According to Tsai (2002), the shift from behaviourism to constructivism in education has contributed to making teachers' beliefs one of the main concerns for research on teaching and teacher education as constructivists hold that peoples' thoughts and actions are based on their earlier constructed beliefs. Pope (1993: 22) lists some examples of the language researchers have used such as teachers' understandings, constructs, decision strategies, metaphors, beliefs, perspectives, practical knowledge, voice, personal intentions, cognition, conceptions, intuitive theories, cognitive activities, subjective theories and plans.

In the ECE context, Wood and Bennett (2001) suggest that teachers' thought processes determine what they do in their classrooms and inform their planning, teaching approach, management and assessment strategies and their interactions with children. They, moreover, continue to suggest that theoretical knowledge about teaching is 'filtered' through teachers' own personal values and modified to fit their own contexts. Therefore, Wood and Bennett think that investigating teachers' theories gives insights into their practice. Day (1993) reported the findings of research which was carried out over two



years with teachers from 11 schools in the Midlands region of England. The research examined the effects of devolved in-service budgets on schools and individual learning behaviours of the teachers. From the brief autobiographies that the teachers wrote about their experiences and the people who had significant influence on their attitudes towards their own professional learning, and the interviews that elaborated them, Day found that leadership support and school culture made important contributions to the quality of both school initiated and school-centred professional learning opportunities. Yet, the most important impacts on the way teachers developed were found to be their personal and professional experiences.

Feldman (1997) discusses three perspectives of teaching and teachers: *teacher knowledge*, *teacher reasoning* and *sociocultural perspectives*. *Teacher knowledge perspective* perceives teachers as individuals who have a great deal of knowledge that is unique to their profession. The *teacher reasoning perspective* conceives teachers as reasoning beings whose expertise lies in their abilities to set goals, make decisions and reflect upon their actions. The *sociocultural perspective* assumes that teachers' beliefs, behaviours, goals and the sociocultural aspects interact, and teachers' actions are related to their beliefs and influenced by the context in which they work. Feldman argues that each of these perspectives is incomplete in defining teaching and teachers, and good teaching entails all three perspectives, referring to them respectively as 'three varieties of wisdom: wisdom of practice, deliberative wisdom and wisdom-in-practice' (p. 769). He, therefore, suggests a fourth perspective, *teaching as a way of being*, which he thinks gives a more comprehensive picture of teaching and teachers. He finally recommends that researchers should interact with teachers and make meanings of their understandings



in their professional contexts. Referring to Feldman's (1997) vision of teachers' wisdom, in Finland, Tirri et al. (1999) explored the features that underlie teachers' thinking with an aim 'to build a conceptual framework of teachers' practical knowing' (p.911). They conducted structured interviews with 33 secondary teachers and narrative interviews with 29 elementary teachers. They found that the teachers share common perspectives, which they identified as 'epistemological standards' that guide their practice.

In the Jordanian context, I investigated EFL (English as a foreign language) teachers' views about, and attitudes towards, self-reflection in primary and secondary schools in Ramtha Directorate of Education (Al-Hassan, 1999). I developed a checklist for evaluating classroom atmosphere and gave it to the participants to use it for reflecting on their own classrooms. The semi-structured interviews I conducted with them after they had had the critical self-reflective experience revealed that most of them had positive views about self-reflection and the experience they had had as it raised their awareness of their practice and led them to improve it. The classroom observations I did with a sample of those teachers before and after their self-reflective experiences also showed this positive impact. Based on the findings of the study, I concluded that teachers should be provided with reflective tools, materials and training that assist them to critically and analytically examine their own practice and be action researchers in their own classrooms.

In reviewing the literature on teacher thinking, I noted that most of it is concerned with practitioners of school-aged children. Clark and Peterson (1986), for instance, reviewed over 100 studies which had been conducted with school-aged children. Many recent

studies have investigated practitioners' perspectives on different school subjects in different school stages (e.g. Westwood et al., 1997; Tsai, 2002; Taylor, 2003; Deemer, 2004; Hancock and Gallard, 2004; Hodge et al., 2004; Hubbard and Abell, 2005). With early years practitioners, however, relatively few studies have been conducted, some of which are cited in the following pages. This phenomenon has been highlighted by Vartuli (1999) in her study of early childhood teachers' beliefs within the American context. As she comments, research in this field has been limited.

### **2.2.1. ECE: Practitioners' Beliefs and Perspectives**

This sub-section reviews some research studies on teacher thinking in the field of ECE. The main topics addressed in those studies were the following: practitioners' aims and priorities in ECE (the studies of Taylor et al., 1972; Turner, 1977 and Wells, 1981 which were cited in Aubrey et al., 2000), practitioners' theories of play (Bennet et al., 1997) and understandings of the National Curriculum (Wood and Bennett, 2001), head teachers' views of a quality curriculum in ECE and the factors that affect its development (Blenkin and Kelly, 1997), the influence of early childhood training programmes and education level on practitioners' beliefs and perspectives (Cassidy et al., 1995; Smith, 1997; Vartuli, 1999; Abbott-Shim et al., 2000; File and Gullo, 2002; McMullen and Alat, 2002), the issue of changing beliefs and the integration between teacher prior beliefs and the desired ones aimed at in education programmes (Brownlee et al., 2000; Maxwell et al., 2001; Raths, 2001), and practitioners' beliefs and practices with regard to developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) (McMullen et al., 2005).

Aubrey et al. (2000) explain that although ECE in general has recently been high on the agenda of policy-makers in the UK, and has started to occupy a prominent position in educational research, its contribution to research is 'relatively small' (p.89). In their review of research on early childhood teachers' aims and beliefs in the 1970s, Aubrey et al. (2000) cited two studies: Taylor et al. (1972) and Turner (1977). Taylor et al. asked nursery teachers about their main aims in working with children. They found that the teachers' major aim was social education, and their list of aims in order of priority was as follows:

- socio-emotional development
- intellectual development
- creation of effective transition from home to school
- aesthetic development
- physical development

(Adapted from Aubrey et al., 2000: 76)

In Turner's (1977) study, play group leaders expressed similar priorities, though physical development preceded aesthetic development. In the 1980s, Wells (1981) and Wertsch et al. (1984) (cited in Aubrey et al., 2000) indicated that the intentions of the adults who prepare the activities for children influence the quality of adult-child interactions. Using in-depth interviewing and classroom observation, Aubrey (1997) (cited in Aubrey et al., 2000) investigated the relationship between reception teachers' beliefs about mathematics and their practice. Her study described teachers' diverse classroom practices and indicated their inadequate subject knowledge. Another study with reception teachers was conducted by Bennett, Wood and Rogers (1997) in which they examined the personal theories of play of nine teachers and videotaped some episodes of play in their classrooms. The videotapes stimulated teachers' reflection on their own practice and revealed that many episodes were not consistent with their theories.



Wood and Bennett (2001) carried out a study to elicit early childhood teachers' understanding of progression and continuity in learning. They also attempted to explore teachers' interpretations of National Curriculum policies in England. The study involved 14 nursery, reception and year 1 teachers in five schools and 7 pairs of children, each of contrasting ability. The methods of data collection included teachers' narrative accounts, semi-structured interviews with teachers, classroom observations and discussions with children. The study revealed that teachers' theories of progression and continuity are closely related to their perspectives about how children learn. It also showed that even though teachers' planning, implementation and assessment are affected by these theories, the National Curriculum policy mediates these processes. In response to these mediating elements, teachers resist, mediate or adapt to the policy frameworks. In addition, the study revealed that teachers encountered some difficulties related to how to reconcile learner-centred with curriculum-centred approaches.

The first phase of a project, 'Principles into Practice: Improving the Quality of Children's Learning', was a national survey of existing ECE provision for children under 8 in all kinds of group settings in England and Wales (Blenkin and Kelly, 1997). In the introduction to their report on the findings of this research project, Blenkin and Kelly (1997) discussed the idea that despite the growing awareness and recognition of the importance of ECE in the UK, what is often overlooked is that ECE provision is beneficial to children when it is of 'a high quality'. They suggest that there is a need for a clear definition of quality from the perspectives of the practitioners working in the field,

and in their study those were the heads of the settings<sup>1</sup>. For data collection, a questionnaire and a structured interview were used. The questionnaire was administered to the heads of the settings to get factual information about early years provision such as resources and practitioners' qualifications and to obtain the heads' views of what constitutes a quality curriculum and the main factors that support or constrain the development of such curriculum for young children. The questionnaire was sent to a random sample of 2,420 settings but only 548 were returned. The structured interviews were undertaken with the heads of 11 settings in the South East of England. The findings of both the questionnaire and the interview showed that most respondents viewed that the appropriate curriculum for young children is a developmental curriculum in which the child's personal development and happiness are paramount. The findings also revealed that the major determinant of quality ECE from the heads' perspectives is the qualities of the staff as they considered it the most important factor that supports the development of a quality curriculum. Other factors were well-trained and specialised staff who have knowledge of child development, the range of staff's experience, adequate resources, partnership between practitioners and parents, and appropriate planning, record keeping and assessment. Surprisingly, a factor that was not considered significant in supporting the development of quality curriculum was in-service training.

Cassidy et al. (1995) investigated the effect of a childhood community college programme on teachers' beliefs and practices. The subjects of the study were 34 teachers: 19 were enrolled in the programme and 15 were a control group. Pretest-posttest design was employed using a Childhood Environment Rating Scale, an Early Environment

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'setting' is usually used in the writings about ECE to refer to the various institutions that provide it such as schools, nurseries and early years centres.



Rating Scale and a Teacher Belief Scale. The findings revealed the existence of significant differences between programme participants and the control group in the post-test as the programme participants had achieved significant gains on the three scales. The study demonstrated a causal relationship between teachers' participation in the programme and changes in their beliefs and classroom behaviours. Similar findings were revealed by Smith's (1997) study of early childhood student teacher beliefs about DAP. Smith also employed a pretest-posttest design using a Teacher Belief Scale with two groups of student teachers: 25 with elementary and early childhood preparation and 35 with elementary preparation only. The results showed that the early childhood group 'endorsed' DAP more than the elementary group who were more interested in traditional practices, and indicated that pre-service education has a 'strong' influence on teacher beliefs.

The findings of Vartuli (1999) and File and Gullo (2002) seem to support the studies of Cassidy et al. (1995) and Smith (1997) with regard to the positive influence of ECE programmes on teachers' beliefs and practices. Vartuli examined the beliefs of teachers from Head Start to third grade and how they related to classroom practice. Using the Early Childhood Survey of Beliefs and Practices, Teacher Beliefs Scale and Classroom Practices Inventory, she found that the teachers with ECE certification had significantly higher belief scores and observed practices than the teachers with elementary education certification. They were also more likely to believe in and employ DAP. She therefore recommended that elementary pre-service education should include an early childhood course. File and Gullo (2002) investigated early childhood and elementary student teachers' beliefs about teaching practices using a modified version of the Teacher Beliefs



and Practices Survey with 45 student teachers enrolled in an ECE programme and 74 enrolled in an elementary education programme. The results revealed that in comparison with elementary school student teachers, early childhood student teachers favoured classroom practices that are more consistent with the constructivist approach. McMullen and Alat (2002) examined the relationship between education level and educational background, and self-reported beliefs about good practice of early childhood teachers and caregivers working with children aged 3 to 6 years. Using DAP as a philosophy for comparison, they found a significant positive correlation between the participants' education level and their DAP belief scores.

Brownlee et al. (2000) described practitioners' previously constructed beliefs as 'naive beliefs' in comparison with 'informed beliefs' drawn on in professional education. Assuming that all early years practitioners hold 'naive' beliefs about working with children, Brownlee et al. studied the integration of caregivers' 'naive' and 'informed' beliefs by analysing their verbal reflections on their videotaped interactions with infants and their written descriptions of their beliefs about good practice. They found that most caregivers had 'naive' beliefs that guide their practice, and those who had 'informed' beliefs were able to provide higher quality care. In conclusion, Brownlee et al. (2000) suggested that professional education for early childhood practitioners should help them integrate 'naive' and 'informed' beliefs, and encourage them to reflect upon their current beliefs and construct new ones based on the theoretical knowledge provided in educational programmes.

Concerning the Head Start programme in the US, Abbott-Shim et al. (2000) have developed a model that identifies early childhood teachers and teacher aides' beliefs and the classroom structural dimensions associated with classroom quality. For data collection, classroom structural characteristics were observed, the quality of classroom teaching practices was assessed by the Assessment Profile for Early Childhood Programmes: Research Version, and teachers and teacher aides completed a Teacher Beliefs Scale, an Instructional Activities Scale and a Family Involvement Survey. The findings of the study have resulted in a model that includes six latent variables: education level, teacher beliefs, instructional activities, classroom quality, attitude towards families and classroom structure. According to the model, the education level directly affects teacher beliefs which influence instructional activities and then impact on classroom quality. The model, Abbott-Shim et al. suggest, provides evidence that one way to promote classroom quality is by enhancing educational opportunities for early childhood teachers which can help to influence their beliefs about instructional practice. Abbott-Shim et al. state that the effectiveness of teacher education, training and supervision should be evaluated with regard to 'the extent to which it leads teachers to changes in their beliefs in the desired direction' (p.130).

Maxwell et al. (2001) agree with Brownlee et al. (2000) and Abbott-Shim et al. (2000) that teachers' beliefs should be addressed in pre-service and in-service training programmes. In their study of the predictors of developmentally appropriate classroom practices in kindergarten through third grade, they found that teacher beliefs accounted for 42% of the variance in classroom practices, and so they concluded that teachers' beliefs are important in understanding their practices. Changing teachers' beliefs has also

been discussed by Rath (2001) who explains that teachers have beliefs shaped early by their school and life experiences. Stressing the impact of these prior beliefs on practice, Rath (2001:2) argues that changing some of them 'should be high on the agenda of teacher educators'. However, he cites technical, ethical, and theoretical problems associated with changing beliefs, and therefore suggests that the issue should be conceptualised as one of 'dispositions' rather than of beliefs. He finally explores three dispositions that should be strengthened in teacher education programmes: knowledge, collegiality and advocacy.

In a cross-cultural comparative study, McMullen et al. (2005) investigated self-reported beliefs and self-reported practices of teachers and caregivers of children aged 3 to 5 in the US, China, Taiwan, Korea and Turkey. DAP was the philosophy of comparison. The Teachers Beliefs Scale was used to measure practitioners' beliefs, and the Instructional Activities Scale was used to measure their practices. The results of the study revealed the existence of similarities across the five countries, particularly with regard to practitioners' beliefs and practices related to integrating across the curriculum, promoting social and emotional development, providing hands-on materials and providing children with opportunities for play and free-choice activities.

In conclusion, the research evidence in this section indicates that practitioners' beliefs and perspectives impact on their practice. It also highlights the need for defining quality ECE from the perspectives of the practitioners working in the field. Moreover, it reveals that education level and specialised ECE training have a positive influence on



practitioners' beliefs and practices, and suggests that practitioners' beliefs should be addressed in pre-service and in-service training programmes.

### **2.2.2. The Foundation Stage: Practitioners' Beliefs and Perspectives**

After the implementation of the FS for children aged 3 to 5 in 2000, a number of studies were conducted in this particular context (Keating et al., 2002; Moyles et al., 2002a; Aubrey, 2004; Adams et al., 2004; Miller and Smith, 2004; Mroz, 2006). This subsection provides a review of these studies. It also reviews the Effective Provision of Pre-school Education (EPPE) Project (Sylva et al., 2003; 2005), a longitudinal study that began in 1997 before the introduction of the FS and continued after it, whose findings support the general approach taken in the *Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage* (CGFS) (QCA/DfEE, 2000).

Keating et al. (2002), for instance, investigated reception teachers' responses to the introduction of the *Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage* (CGFS) (QCA/DfEE, 2000). They conducted semi-structured interviews with 12 reception teachers to obtain their views about the CGFS. They found that the teachers had positive views about it because it recognised the FS as a valuable distinct stage in children's education, it acknowledged the importance of play in children's learning, and it enabled them to return openly to what they thought to be sound practice in early years. The teachers, however, had some concerns about lack of awareness of children's needs by some stakeholders and lack of resources.

The Study of Pedagogical Effectiveness in Early Learning (SPEEL) project (Moyle et al., 2002a), which was funded by the DfES, investigated the FS practitioners' perceptions and understanding of effective pedagogy. The project, which involved 27 geographically spread FS settings in England, used different methods for data gathering: literature review; interviews with 27 head teachers/managers and 18 practitioners; parent questionnaires distributed to 400 parents with 213 responses; documentary analysis of the documentation available in each setting; and video-stimulated reflective dialogue in which twenty-minute episodes of effective teaching of 35 practitioners were videotaped and used as part of collaborative dialogue between the researcher and the practitioners. The study was conducted with identified effective settings and practitioners. The main outcome of the SPEEL was the Framework of Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years that can be used alongside the CGFS. The framework consists of 129 key statements categorised under three major areas: practice, principles and professional dimensions (see Moyle et al, 2002a: 49-58). The findings also revealed that:

- Early years pedagogy is very complex and, thus, its effectiveness has to be perceived as a whole rather than as isolated elements.
- Practitioners feel that their role is supporting children's development within a facilitating role rather than direct teaching.
- Knowledge of child development and how children learn was viewed as fundamental for effective teaching and learning by practitioners and head teachers/managers.
- Play was a high priority in practitioners' thinking but not in practice.
- The importance of parental involvement in children's learning and development was recognised and valued.
- Practitioners saw children as individuals and invested time and energy to develop relationships with each child, but this was found difficult when the adult-to-child ratios were poor, particularly in reception.
- Practitioners had some valuable personal qualities such as patience, tolerance and good humour.
- Concerning meeting children's different needs, especially children with special educational needs (SEN), differentiation occurred through the activities and the practitioners' contact with them rather than at the



planning stage. The early identification of children with SEN rarely occurred.

- Developmental records occurred more than formative diagnostic records, and the cyclical process of planning - assessment – recording was neither well understood nor well used.
- Practitioners perceived education and care as inseparable in the early years.
- Outdoor experiences were ‘problematic’ in some settings as they lacked or did not have outdoor facilities.
- Reflective dialogue had a positive impact on practitioners’ practice and pedagogical skills. Practitioners’ ability to reflect on their practice was related to their training level and the ethos within their settings.

Moyle et al. (2002b: 476) discussed the impact of the reflective dialogue in the SPEEL project pointing out the following aspects that were found:

- Stimulated interest in pursuing a reflective approach to practice, as enhanced through use of video.
- Willingness to engage in critical enquiry with other colleagues.
- Desire to continue involvement in and contribution to research.
- Developing sense of self efficacy within the domain of reflective pedagogy.

Moyle et al. concluded that reflective dialogues can help early years practitioners to gain insight into their own practices, challenge them and generate a knowledge base for themselves.

In a DfEE-sponsored study (Aubrey, 2004), the perspectives, attitudes and concerns of head teachers and reception teachers were sought in order to investigate the challenges they face in their implementation of the FS. The study also gathered information about the provision and teachers’ characteristics. Structured telephone interviews were conducted with a nationally representative sample of schools in England. The sample which was stratified by Local Education Authorities (LEA) consisted of 799 head teachers and 752 reception teachers. The findings showed that the majority of the head



teachers (91%) and reception teachers (95%) had positive views about the FS, and 86% of the head teachers thought that they made ‘a lot of progress’ in implementing it. According to the head teachers and the teachers, the main advantages of the FS were that it:

- defines the reception year and creates a bridge between the nursery and KS1;
- encourages flexibility and informality in teaching style and curriculum organization;
- focuses on child development, with emphasis on personal, social and emotional development, child-centred and child-led activities, verbal skills and less pressure on the child;
- focuses on practical play and outdoor activity;
- benefits teachers through the provision of good guidance (Aubrey, 2004: 647)

They, however, described the following problems they faced in the implementation of the FS:

- timing, with the FS being introduced too quickly;
- cost of increased staffing, resourcing and lack of facilities, equipment and materials;
- staffing, that is, shortage of classroom support staff and poor adult-to-child ratios;
- unclear guidance, with a feeling that there had been a mixed message about structured/unstructured work, training received too late and the FS being difficult to explain to parents;
- disruption of children by being distinct from KS1, with insufficient preparation for KS1 and holding back children ready for more formal learning;
- buildings and grounds inadequate for activities;
- mixed-age classes using two different curricula (Aubrey, 2004: 648).

The findings also revealed that two-thirds of the respondents thought that implementing the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies with a more flexible approach was not a problem. Moreover, 72% of the head teachers and 77% of the teachers did not consider transition to KS1 as a problem. The respondents in schools with mixed-age classes described some difficulties in teaching two curricula from the CGFS and the KS1

Programmes of Study. With regard to the assessment of children's progress, the study found that most reception teachers use observations, Baseline Assessment, annotated samples of work, records from nursery, and asking children's own views. There was no mention of the *Foundation Stage Profile* (FSP) (QCA/DfES, 2003), the current main assessment document, as this telephone survey was done before the introduction of the FSP. The study revealed the importance of providing FS training for both head teachers and teachers. Aubrey (2004: 655) concluded that in early years settings the tension between planning an informal curriculum based on children's needs and experiences and 'the exigencies of a prescribed heavily structured curriculum endures'.

In a study sponsored by the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL), Adams et al. (2004) aimed to establish an overall picture of current practice in reception classes, to document good early years practice of a group of reception practitioners, to identify the main constructs in those practitioners' work, and to explore the practices that represent those constructs and how they impact on reception children. The study which was undertaken from February 2002 to August 2003 used a questionnaire survey of head teachers, reception teachers, teaching assistants, FS governors, and local authority and EYDCPs (Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships) personnel in 11 local education authorities (LEAs) across England. The questionnaire survey was followed by interviews with a sample of the six groups surveyed in seven authorities. Observations were also conducted in nine selected reception classes. In addition to the five main findings resulted from all the data and their recommendations which were based on those findings, the researchers, Adams, Alexander, Drummond and Moyles, reported the key findings of the three different methods of data gathering and made a number of



recommendations based on them (see Adams et al., 2004: 18-27). The five major findings of the study were as follows:

- There were significant discrepancies between the questionnaire data, the interview data and the observation data. The questionnaire data showed that both the FS and the CGFS were welcomed by practitioners, and had presented few difficulties or challenges to practice in schools. The interview data showed that the implementation of the FS had not been quite as straightforward as the questionnaire data suggested, and there was evidence of some confusion. Then the classroom observations provided evidence that everyday practice in classrooms does not adequately reflect the principles of early childhood education, even as set out in the Guidance document.
- There is a demonstrable gap between the quality of children's experiences in the reception classes in the sample and the quality of their experiences in the first year of the FS in the best nurseries and family centres as highlighted in other research.
- There was evidence that reception class practitioners experienced pressure from their Key Stage 1 colleagues to prioritise particular kinds of achievements (for example, literacy, numeracy and familiarity with particular school routines).
- There was evidence that the function of the reception year was seen exclusively in terms of the whole school context and the start of statutory education; there was a relatively low level of awareness of the relationship of the reception year to the education of all FS children, within the structures of the EYDCP.
- There was extensive evidence of a perceived need for a variety of different kinds of training. Some kinds of training were, surprisingly, not identified as necessary or even desirable.

(Adapted from Adams et al., 2004: 18-19)

On the basis of their research findings, Adams et al. (2004: 23) concluded that there is 'an urgent need for coherence, clarity and co-ordination in the work of all those involved in provision' for reception class children, and there is also a need for 'a shared understanding' of the purposes of the FS as a distinct two-year period of early education, not a preparation for Key Stage 1. They, therefore, recommended that a variety of training courses, conferences and seminars should be provided for practitioners and all people involved in the FS provision, and that the best practices in the first year of the FS



should extend to the reception year. They also recommended that FS practitioners should be trusted and supported by training opportunities and documentation that would help them be confident and creative, rather than prescribe what they should do.

Miller and Smith (2004) studied practitioners' beliefs about the literacy curriculum in four early years settings working with the CGFS, and how these beliefs affected their practice and the literacy experiences they offered to the children. One week, specifically five sessions, was spent in each setting where narrative observations on 20 children (5 in each setting) were conducted. Semi-structured interviews were undertaken with 5 key adults, specifically a playgroup leader, a nursery class teacher, two reception teachers and a group leader, to examine their views about their practice, the CGFS, parental involvement and literacy learning and teaching. A literacy checklist was also used to gather data about literacy practice. The interview data were compared with the observations. The findings showed that the practitioners believed that the learning areas set in the CGFS should be integrated, and that children learn through play and interaction with adults. The observations, however, showed formal practices performed especially in the reception class and the playgroup. The findings also revealed that the teaching of literacy was influenced by the practitioners' beliefs about how literacy should be taught, the difference in their interpretations of the CGFS which seemed to be due to their level of training and experience, and the external pressure from the demands of the primary school curriculum and parents. Miller and Smith (2004) suggested that practitioners should be supported by training materials and programmes.

Mroz (2006) discussed the findings of a questionnaire from 294 FS teachers. In addition to demographic questions, the questionnaire included 5-point Likert scale questions to obtain data about six areas of speech and language development: 'comprehension; attention and listening skills; the relationship between play and language development; speech sound development; expressive language; use of language in social contexts' (p.48). The results revealed that 77% of the teachers had not received any input on difficulties in speech and language development in their initial training. In relation to the coverage of typically developing language within initial training, 56.5% of the respondents thought that it had been brief in all areas except for the relationship between play and language development. The respondents were more confident in relation to the areas that had been covered thoroughly in initial training. Yet, no direct correlation was found between their confidence and competence. With regard to post-qualification training, 52% of the teachers had had training in child language development, 40% in typical child language development, and only 24% had had specialist courses on speech and language disorder or delay. The results also showed that 76% of the respondents would have liked training on speech and language disorders. They, moreover, wished to have '*specific* guidance' (p.58) that assists them to identify children with speech and language difficulties. Mroz concluded that their wish is 'well founded' and that there is a need for ongoing professional development. She also concluded that it is very important for FS teachers to have the knowledge and the skills that enable them to identify children with language difficulties at the earliest stage.

The EPPE is a longitudinal study funded by the DfES and it consists of two phases (Sylva et al., 2003; 2005). The first phase is the Effective Provision of Pre-school Education



Project (EPPE 3-7) (1997-2003), and the second phase is the Effective Pre-school and Primary Education Project (EPPE 3-11) (2003-2008). The first phase, which began in 1997, was a five-year study that assessed the development and attainment of children aged between 3 and 7 years. It examined the effects of pre-school education for children aged 3 and 4 by gathering a wide range of data on over 3,000 children, their parents, home environments and the pre-school settings they attended. Quantitative and qualitative methods were used to investigate 'the effects of pre-school education on children's cognitive attainment and social/behavioural development at entry to school and any continuing effects on such outcomes two years later at the end of Key Stage 1 (age 7)' (Sylva et al., 2003: 1; 2005: 2). The sources of data were standardised child assessments, child profiles completed by pre-school practitioners, interviews with parents and pre-school staff, quality rating scales, and case study observations and interviews.

The findings of the EPPE revealed that pre-school education had positive effects on children's development, especially in the case of disadvantaged children; the quality of the pre-school settings was directly related to better cognitive and social/behavioural development; settings having staff with higher qualifications, particularly trained teachers, were of higher quality and their children made more progress; children made better overall progress in the settings that consider educational and social development as complementary and equally important; effective pedagogy includes interaction, instructive learning environment and sustained shared thinking that extends children's learning; the home had an important impact on children and the quality of the learning environment of children's homes promoted their cognitive and social development. Furthermore, the EPPE undertook intensive case studies in 12 settings which were



identified of greater effectiveness based on the progress of their children with an aim to examine the practices that might explain their effectiveness. The results of those case studies revealed five areas that were of particular importance when working with children aged 3 to 5. 'These were the quality of adult-child verbal interactions; staff knowledge and understanding of the curriculum; knowledge of how young children learn; adult's skill in supporting children in resolving conflicts and helping parents to support children's learning in the home' (Sylva et al., 2003: 4-5; 2005: 10). Based on the case studies conducted in the EPPE project, Siraj-Blatchford et al. (2002) investigated effective pedagogy in early years. The findings showed that good outcomes for children are linked to the same areas that were found to explain effectiveness in the most effective settings. It also revealed that those effective settings provided both teacher-initiated group work and freely chosen instructive play activities. As for the second phase of the EPPE, it builds on the data gathered in the first phase and follows the children up to the age of 11 at the end of Key Stage 2 (Sylva et al., 2005).

To conclude, the studies that investigated the FS revealed that most practitioners had positive views about the introduction of the FS and the CGFS. They, however, showed some difficulties in the implementation of the FS and its curriculum in schools, and concluded that FS practitioners need support and specialised training. Obviously, the findings of those studies highlight the need for further research into the FS context in particular.

## **2.3. Good Practice in ECE**

The first part of this section throws some light on good educational practice in general and principles and features of good practice in ECE in particular. The second part demonstrates the demanding nature of working in ECE and the roles that early years practitioners should play effectively to provide good practice.

### **2.3.1. Theorising Good Practice**

The phrase ‘good practice’ is used in educational discourse (see for example, Alexander, 1992; Ball, 1994; QCA/DfEE, 1999, 2000). Yet, good practice, as Alexander (1992) discusses, is conceptually and empirically problematic, and that is why, when some writers use the phrase, they place it in inverted commas. Some solve the problem of good practice by talking of effective practice, effective teachers or effective schools. This, obviously, does not solve the problem. Alexander (1992) suggests that the problem of good practice should be addressed and discussed. He criticises the idea that policy makers are the ones who have the authority to define good practice:

... the idea that an LEA – let alone a national government – can be the sole definer, arbiter and guardian of good practice must be abandoned. The assumption is offensive to teachers; it encourages professional dependency; it discourages professional autonomy and self-motivated development; and it is in any case empirically unsustainable (Alexander, 1992: 89).

He suggests that much more consideration should be given to the individual practitioner in discussing practice because practice cannot exist independently from the practitioner’s personality, preferences and intentions. Alexander (1992: 184) conceptualises educational practice in the framework shown in Figure 1. The framework has two main dimensions and seven categories. Although it does not show the relationship between the dimensions

or the categories, Alexander explains that the two dimensions are interactive and the categories are not discrete but interrelated. He suggests that the accounts of good practice expressed by official documents, practitioners and educators often focus on some of the

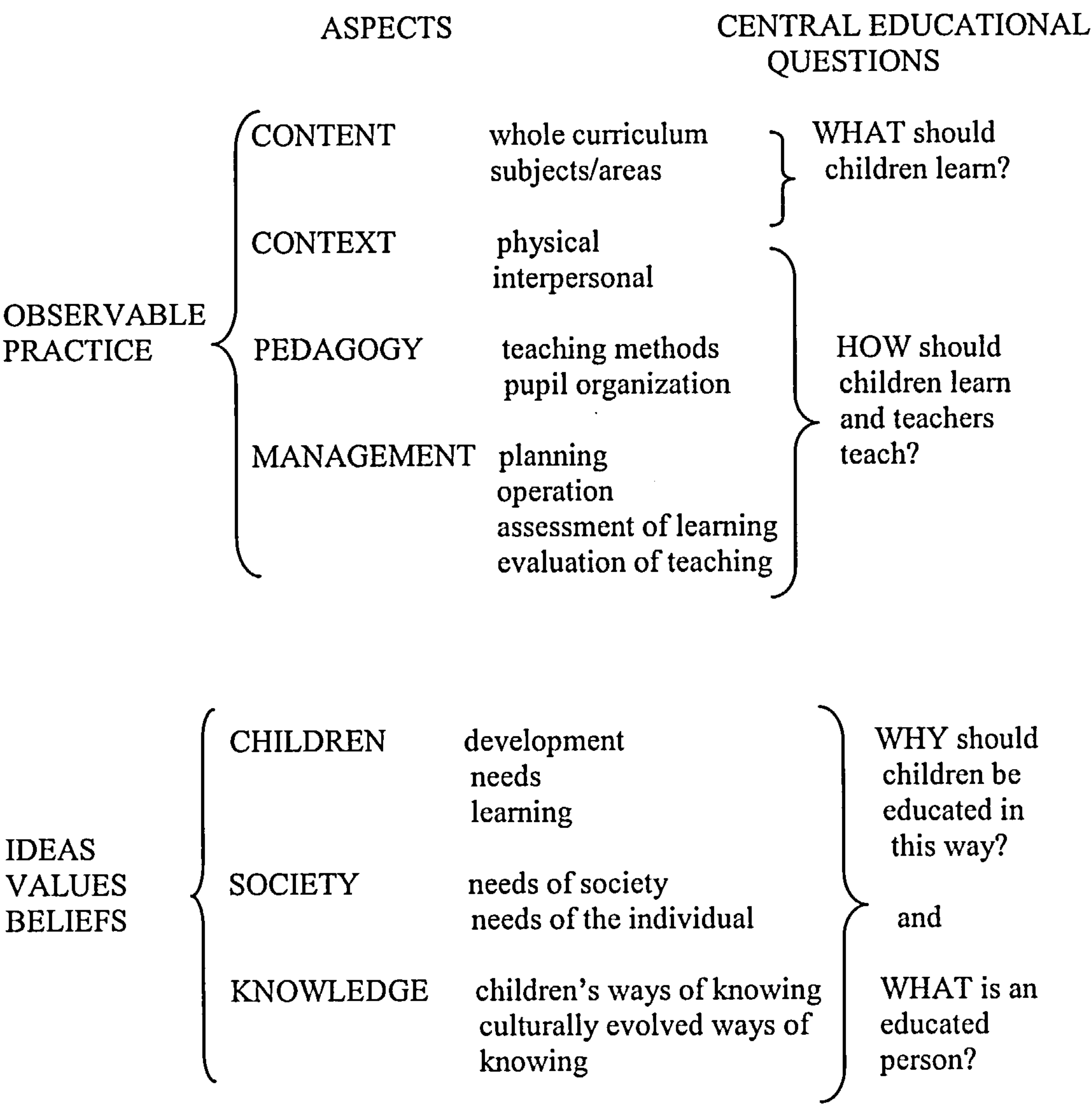


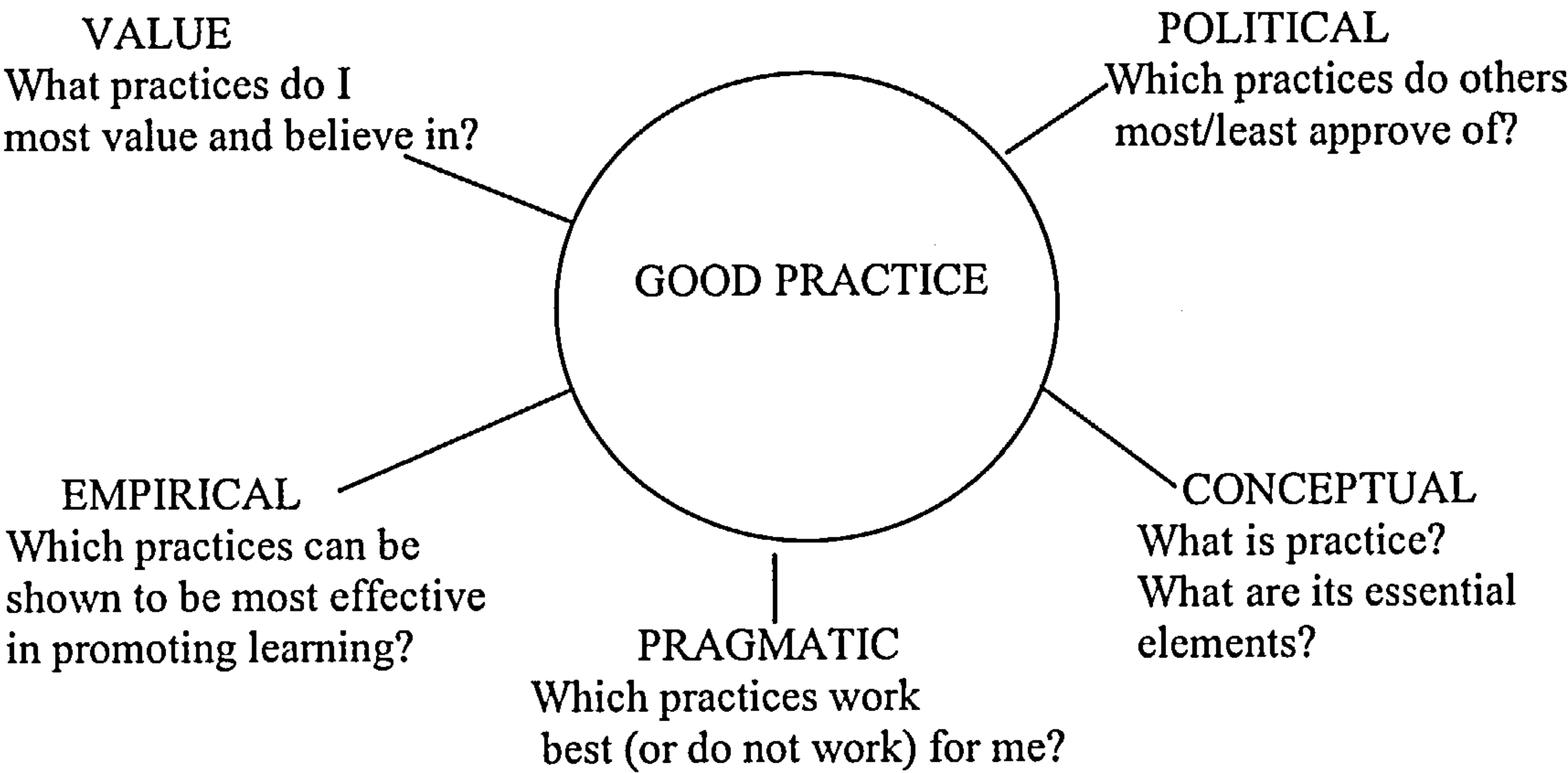
Figure 1: Educational Practice: A Conceptual Framework

aspects demonstrated in the framework and neglect others. He exemplifies this by applying his framework to Plowden’s report and the National Curriculum. He thinks that



Plowden focuses on *context* and *pedagogy* whereas the National Curriculum focuses on *content* and *management*.

Furthermore, Alexander discusses that good practice exists at the intersection of five considerations: *value*, *empirical*, *conceptual*, *political* and *pragmatic* as illustrated in Figure 2. He thinks that all those considerations are important but not equivalent as good practice requires setting these considerations in a hierarchical relationship in which *value*



**Figure 2: What is Good Practice? Reconciling Competing Imperatives**  
(Alexander, 1992: 186)

and *empirical* considerations are ‘pre-eminent’. He explains that ethical and empirical dimensions are very important to have good educational practice:

... close attention to these two is what distinguishes *good* practice from *mere* practice [italics in the original]. Education is inherently about values: it reflects a vision of the kind of world we want our children to inherit; a vision of the kinds of people we hope they will become; a vision of what it is to be an educated person. Values, then, are central: whatever other

ingredients of good practice may be, they should enable a coherent and sustainable value-position to be pursued (Alexander, 1992: 188).

The Rumbold Report (DES, 1990), *Starting with Quality*, offered a framework for development and practical help for all those concerned with children in their early years. It suggested that it is 'vital' that early years practitioners and all people involved with young children realise the significance of their educational role and do it effectively. Explaining the characteristics of children, the report highlighted that the early childhood stage is a period of rapid growth and development. In this stage, while children follow certain patterns of development and have common characteristics which enable practitioners to plan shared activities and experiences, there are individual differences between them that should be taken into account in what is planned and offered for them. Curiosity, as the report explained, is a natural attribute of early childhood as children want to know about everything around them and they ask many questions. Practitioners, therefore, should have the willingness and the competencies to thoughtfully respond to this curiosity so that they can nurture children's imagination and encourage them to ask further questions and to enjoy learning. The Rumbold Report stressed the important role that practitioners play in developing the child's self-image and self-confidence as these depend on the quality of the child's early encounters with other people. In this regard, the child's home and good relationships between home and early years setting are significant as they foster the establishment of a loving environment in which the child feels accepted and valued.

The Rumbold Report (DES, 1990) did not support the introduction of a National Curriculum for children aged under five years. Rather, it suggested the need for 'a

flexible framework from which a curriculum can be developed to suit the needs of individual children in a variety of settings' (p. 8). In its attempt to offer such a framework, the report followed the HMI (Her Majesty's Inspectorate) publication, *The Curriculum from 5 to 16* (DES, 1985) and recommended a curriculum based on nine areas of learning: linguistic, aesthetic and creative, human and social, mathematical, moral, physical, scientific, technological, and spiritual. It, however, pointed out that having these areas helps ensure breadth, balance and continuity with the National Curriculum, but they should be integrated in a cross-curricular approach. The report suggested that it is the responsibility of practitioners to plan and provide the experiences that support and enhance the child's development emphasising that practitioners should not over-concentrate on formal teaching and attainment of specific targets. Practitioners should also pay much attention not only to the content of learning, but also to 'the context in which learning takes place, the people involved in it, and the values and beliefs which are embedded in it' (p. 9).

According to the Rumbold Report (DES, 1990: 12), to have good practice that supports children's learning effectively, practitioners need to:

- a. build relationships of trust with children so that they develop the confidence to take risks in a secure setting and can accept, use and overcome minor failures;
- b. plan, with others, children's experiences on the basis of observation and assessment of their interests, abilities and needs;
- c. be aware of their influence as a role model to the children and use it to challenge stereotyped ideas;
- d. hold, and make explicit, high expectations of all children on the basis of genuine belief in their ability to achieve;
- e. value children's ideas and feelings;
- f. collaborate with others involved in the child's learning and development (parents, carers, those involved in previous, parallel and subsequent provision, health visitors, social workers etc);



- g. recognise their own need for continuing learning and professional development, and act upon that recognition.

*Start Right* report (Ball, 1994) on RSA (The Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures & Commerce) project that studied the pre-school provision in the UK discussed the nature of good practice in early years. It concluded with twelve principles from which it derived ten features of good practice. The principles were:

1. Early childhood is the foundation on which children build the rest of their lives. But it is not just a preparation for adolescence and adulthood: it has an importance in itself.
2. Children develop at different rates, and in different ways – emotionally, intellectually, morally, socially, physically and spiritually. All are important; each is interwoven with others.
3. All children have abilities which can (and should be) identified and promoted.
4. Young children learn from everything that happens to them and around them; they do not separate their learning into different subjects or disciplines.
5. Children learn most effectively through actions, rather than instruction.
6. Children learn best when they are actively involved and interested. Motivation is one of the prerequisites of learning; confidence is the other.
7. Children who feel confident in themselves and their own ability have a headstart to learning.
8. Children need time and space to produce work of quality and depth.
9. What children can do (rather than what they cannot do) is the starting point in their learning.
10. Play and conversation are the main ways by which young children learn about themselves, other people and the world around them.
11. Children who are encouraged to think for themselves are more likely to act independently.
12. The relationships which children make with other children and with adults are of central importance to their development.

(Adapted from Ball, 1994: 51-53)

The features of good practice set out in *Start Right* (Ball, 1994: 54-56) were: the establishment of clear aims and objectives shared among all parties; planning a broad, balanced and developmentally appropriate curriculum; a variety of learning experiences

which are active, relevant and enjoyable; the development of warm and positive relationships in the setting; a well planned, stimulating, secure and healthy environment; a commitment to equal opportunities and social justice for all children; systematic planning, assessment and record keeping; satisfactory adult-to-child ratios and ongoing development and training of all adults; partnership with parents and liaison with the community; and effective procedures for monitoring and evaluating the quality of practice.

The principles of good practice set out in *Start Right* report tie in with Bruce's (1987, 1997) principles. Based on the work of the pioneer educators, particularly Froebel, Montessori and Steiner, Bruce worked out ten 'bedrock' principles of practice in ECE in the first edition of her book (Bruce, 1987) and revisited and reframed those principles in the second edition (Bruce, 1997: 17) as follows:

1. The best way to prepare children for their adult life is to give them what they need as children.
2. Children are whole people who have feelings, ideas and relationships with others, and who need to be physically, mentally, morally and spiritually healthy.
3. Subjects such as mathematics and art cannot be separated; young children learn in an integrated way and not in neat, tidy compartments.
4. Children learn best when they are given appropriate responsibility, allowed to make errors, decisions and choices, and respected as autonomous learners.
5. Self-discipline is emphasised. Indeed, this is the only kind of discipline worth having. Reward systems are very short-term and not work in the long-term. Children need their efforts to be valued.
6. There are times when children are especially able to learn particular things.
7. What children can do (rather than what they cannot do) is the starting point of a child's education.
8. Imagination, creativity and all kinds of symbolic behaviour (reading, writing, drawing, dancing, music, mathematical numbers, algebra, role play and talking) develop and emerge when conditions are favourable.
9. Relationships with other people (both adults and children) are of central importance in a child's life.



10. Quality education is about three things: the child, the context in which learning takes place, and the knowledge and understanding which the child develops and learns.

In her attempt to outline a curriculum for pre-school children, Curtis (1998) suggests that there are still some questions to ask about good practice and practitioners' role. Curtis (1998: ix) points out that analysis of ECE programmes that have been successful in many countries in the world indicates that those programmes include the following features although their emphasis differs: involving parents in their children's education, emphasising the development of sound interpersonal relationships, maintaining a balance between child-directed and adult-directed activities, having specific curriculum objectives, focusing on the needs of individual children, and emphasising that nursery school is fun. According to Mooney et al. (2003), to distinguish between good practice and poor practice in pr-school provision, the concept of 'quality' should be defined. They, however, suggest that there is no single definition of quality as definitions of this concept depend on the perspectives of different stakeholders. They, furthermore, think that cultural values affect those definitions and consequently affect practice. They illustrate this by the Reggio Emilia approach to ECE in Italy (Malaguzzi, 1998; Edwards et al., 1998) suggesting that the practice of the practitioners adopting this approach reflects its values and perceptions of childhood.

The literature reviewed in this sub-section perceives good educational practice as the practice that helps children develop their selves from all aspects with apparent emphasis on personal, social and ethical ones. It also considers good practice as that which is developmentally appropriate for children and which provides them with opportunities that effectively support and promote their learning and development. It, moreover,



highlights the important role and the influence of the adults who deal with children. Furthermore, some of this literature (Alexander, 1992) emphasises that practitioners should be involved in the discussion of good practice and much consideration should be given to them in this respect.

### **2.3.2. Good Practice and Practitioners' Role in ECE**

Research evidence shows a common consensus among ECE specialists regarding the complexity and demanding nature of working with children (e.g. Athey, 1990; Edwards and Knight, 1994; Rodd, 1994; Nutbrown, 1994; Cullingford, 1995; Blenkin and Kelly, 1997; Hujala, 2002; Sumsion, 2002; Malone and Denno, 2003; Wai-Yum, 2003). Edwards and Knight (1994: 1), for instance, describes teaching young children as 'one of the most difficult of educational jobs'. Rodd (1994: 33) points out the huge demands on early childhood teachers who are responsible for deciding 'the experiences which will optimise young children's development and learning'. For effective teaching and learning, Nutbrown (1994) suggests that early years practitioners should have the following roles: planning a curriculum that meets children's needs, organising the appropriate learning environment, observing children, interacting with children, monitoring all aspects of their work, assessing children's learning, recording observations and assessments, communicating with staff team, parents and other educators, acting upon what they experience and finally, reflecting on their work.

Athey (1990) and Nutbrown (1994) criticise the assumption that anyone can work with young children and assert that people who work with children should be knowledgeable and qualified. In their view, teachers should know about child development and

particularly about schematic theory. Based on the Froebel Early Education Project 1973-1978 and the observational data obtained, Athey (1990) identified several types of schemas that are children's repeatable behaviours. Athey (1990) and Nutbrown (1994) suggest that early schemas provide the basis for later learning. Having sufficient knowledge about schemas, their types and their meanings enables practitioners to identify children's schemas by observation and to provide materials and activities that nourish and extend these schemas.

Hevey and Curtis (1996: 224-226) argue that researchers have not stated what exactly constitutes an effective early childhood practitioner. They believe that determining what competencies early years practitioners require is essential in order to design an appropriate training programme. They divide the required competencies into three areas: personal and social skills, professional skills and practical skills. As for personal and social skills, early childhood practitioners should have a positive self-image, be well-educated, be aware and sensitive to the needs of others, be committed and non-judgmental, be alert to the need for personal and professional development, and be able to communicate with all children, colleagues, parents and other agencies regardless of their culture, religion or gender. With regard to professional skills, practitioners should have knowledge of child development, ability to develop strategies to transmit knowledge to others, deep understanding of the subjects in the early childhood curriculum and the value of play, knowledge and respect of cultural and social differences, observational skills, an ability to assess children and themselves, and knowledge of policies and their underlying philosophy. Concerning the practical skills, practitioners should plan programmes which ensure both continuity and progression, understand others' point of view, work in a team



and adopt common strategies that allow the aims of the early childhood institution to be met. Hevey and Curtis suggested that these skills can be developed by sensitive and effective training.

Some researchers place emphasis on early childhood practitioners' role as designers of an appropriate learning environment (e.g. Beaty, 1984; Blenkin and Whitehead, 1996; Curtis, 1998; Riley, 1998; Hujala, 2002; Lin et al., 2003; Lobman, 2003). Riley (1998: 46) discusses the importance of providing children with 'an environment that is supportive, stimulating and challenging in its provision of rich experiences and activities'. Hujala (2002:100) defines the early childhood practitioner as 'a tutor for learning and designer of a learning environment'. Lin et al. (2003) also stress the crucial role that teachers play in planning appropriate environments that nurture children's growth and development, and influence their future success at school. Beaty (1984), Blenkin and Whitehead (1996) and Curtis (1998) discuss the nature of the appropriate early childhood material and interpersonal environment. They explain that the material environment should be safe and secure, include indoor and outdoor spaces and a variety of resourced activity areas such as areas for role play, art and craft, literacy and books, math and science, sand, water and clay, music and cooking. It should also contain a wide range of materials which are visible and accessible to children. As for the interpersonal environment, they emphasise that practitioners should establish friendly warm relationships with children. They suggest that interacting with children, spending adequate time with each child, knowing about and accepting each child, and involving parents and working in cooperation with them help in developing such relationships. Beaty (1984) suggests that practitioners should be good models as children learn from



their behaviours, and they should be consistent in whatever they do and treat children fairly so that children will trust them. Parental involvement in particular has also been emphasised by Hurst (1991), Rennie (1996), Hall and Santer (2000), Karstadt and Medd (2000), Adams et al. (2004), Hall et al. (2005) and Swick (2006) who explain that children's progress and emotional well-being are highly enhanced when there is a collaborative relationship between their parents and the early childhood setting. Therefore, practitioners should realise the importance of parental involvement and endeavour to work in partnership with parents in an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect. 'Parents are the child's first, and continuing, educators' (Rennie, 1996: 190). The child's development starts at home and the experiences he/she has are gained at home. Thus, parents' involvement is helpful to practitioners as they inform them about children's experiences and interests and support them in their work to ensure optimum learning and development.

The importance of play has been emphasised by researchers (e.g. Day, 1980; Hutt et al., 1989; Edwards and Knight, 1994; Hall, 1994; Moyles, 1994; David, 1996; Guha, 1996; Bennett et al., 1997; Curtis, 1998; Riley, 1998; Baily, 1999; Grainger and Goouch, 1999; Hawkins, 1999; Lobman, 2003; Saracho, 2004) who argue that play is a crucial factor in children's learning and development and not only an intrinsic pleasurable activity of childhood. Hutt et al. (1989) propose a taxonomy of children's play dividing it into categories and emphasising its importance in children's learning. Guha (1996: 72) stresses the importance of including and valuing play in early childhood curriculum, and summarises the following four arguments that frequently occur in the literature that calls for play in school:

1. The romantic argument – the concern is for the ‘whole child’. If children feel ‘happy’ while playing, then every effort needs to be made to provide them with play opportunities [inverted commas in the original].
2. The behaviourist argument – play is enjoyable, it acts as a reward. The educator needs to control it judiciously. After a certain amount of learning, children deserve to play.
3. The therapeutic argument – children struggle with fears and anxieties. In play they are able to express and overcome these. Therefore play should be provided for better mental hygiene.
4. The cognitive argument – children learn to solve problems, to think creatively, to communicate, they learn social rules while playing. For all these desirable learning outcomes play should be encouraged.

Moreover, Hall (1994), Grainger and Goouch (1999), and Saracho (2004) discuss the importance of play in developing literacy and the effective role teachers have in setting up a print-rich environment. Moyles (1994: 4) argues for the ‘excellence of play’ stating that ‘practitioners should be advocating strongly in support of a greater understanding of the potential contribution of play to children’s development and learning’.

Observation and assessment are considered a central and integral part of early childhood educational processes (e.g. Bruce, 1987; Drummond, 1993; Hurst, 1994; Drummond and Nutbrown, 1996; Webber, 1999). ‘Observation is a high-level professional process, requiring a well-founded understanding of early childhood education and the development of classroom expertise’ (Hurst, 1994: 173). Observing children and analysing the observations are deemed to be essential features of good practice in early years as observations serve several purposes: they help practitioners to plan an appropriate curriculum for the children; they provide input for the assessment of children, and they help practitioners to reflect on their practices and evaluate their effectiveness.



Self-reflection is considered an essential feature of good practice. Reflection is viewed as an important tool for self-learning and the development of knowledge by many well-known philosophers. Ages ago, Socrates recognised the importance of self-reflection and his saying 'know thyself' indicates that. Dewey (1916, 1933), Habermas (1972) and Kolb (1984), whose works are considered the roots of the study of reflection, indicate that being reflective is one of the important characteristics of effective practitioners. Dewey allies reflection with thought and experience. He thinks that 'thought or reflection ... is the discernment of the relation between what we try to do and what happens in consequence' (Dewey, 1916: 144-145). Habermas (1972) views reflection as a tool for interpreting and critically evaluating knowledge in order to foster self-understanding and develop forms of knowledge. Kolb, whose cycle (see Kolb, 1984: 42) boosted the study of experiential learning which had emerged earlier in Dewey, Lewin and Piaget's works, views reflection as having a key role in experiential learning. Moreover, Schön (1983) describes two forms of reflection necessary for practitioners: reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. The former occurs during action, guides it and improves performance. The latter occurs after action. It looks back on past experiences and analyses them to extract generalisations that will inform future actions and help in theory building.

Many researchers indicate the importance of self-reflection in educational practice (e.g. Beaty, 1984; Nutbrown, 1994; Ball, 1994; Hevey and Curtis, 1996; Pascal and Bertram, 1997; Al-Hassan, 1999; Keyes, 2000; Moyles, 2001). Based on her experience in working in partnerships with 29 early years teachers in two projects, Keyes (2000) stressed the importance of teachers' role as researchers in their own classrooms doing



action research. In the projects, the teachers completed reflective questionnaires at the beginning and the end of each project; sessions in their classrooms were videotaped, and they were given articles and materials about action research. Then, they were given the tapes and they reflected on their own classrooms. Keyes found that this process raised the teachers' awareness of their practice and their understanding of children. She also found that the teachers would like to do research but they cannot because they lack the time and the help. She therefore concluded that universities should work in partnership with teachers to help and encourage them to do action research. Similarly, Moyles (2001) found that when working in partnership with researchers, early childhood teachers are able to engage in a high level of critical reflection on their own practice and link related theory. Clark and Stroud (2002) investigated the effect of a collaborative relationship between a university and two early childhood centres on the quality of care and education in the centres. The findings of their study revealed that this relationship had a positive impact, and thus they concluded that there is a need for combined efforts and cooperation among all institutions in order to improve ECE quality.

In conclusion, the research evidence reviewed in this sub-section demonstrates that working in the early years is a demanding job that implies many roles and responsibilities. This job, therefore, requires knowledgeable, competent and well qualified staff who can do these roles successfully and effectively, providing what is best for children.

## **2.4. ECE in the English Context**

This section focuses the light on the English context. Firstly, it gives an overview of early childhood provision in England. Then, it concentrates on the recent development in the provision, that is the introduction of the FS. It shows the importance and aims of the FS and the main official documents associated with it. It also reports the official account of good practice in the FS as stated in those documents, particularly the CGFS.

### **2.4.1. Early Childhood Provision in England: An Overview**

In the late 18th century voluntary ECE emerged in Britain. In 1816, Robert Owen established the first nursery school, the infant school, in the UK at New Lanark in Scotland. His nursery aroused interest in early childhood education in Britain and resulted in establishing several nurseries (Spodek and Brown, 1993; Kwon, 2002). In 1870, schools were allowed to admit children aged 3 and above despite the fact that compulsory education began at the age of 5. In 1908 Margaret and Rachel McMillan opened the first clinic school in Bow. They then opened an open-air nursery in Deptford stressing children's physical and mental development (Spodek and Brown, 1993; Graham and Santer, 2000). In 1923 the Nursery School Association was established with Margaret McMillan as the President. A year later the Malting House School was opened by Susan Isaacs who published *Intellectual Growth in Young Children* in 1930 and *Social Development in Young Children* in 1933 which were based on her work in this school. During World War II there was a rapid increase in nurseries as there was a need for women workers. The year 1961 witnessed the birth of the pre-school movement when parents founded many self-help pre-schools because of the lack of nursery provision (Graham and Santer, 2000).

Historically, in contrast with compulsory school education, 'pre-school educational provision in England has been patchy and diverse with little overall planning' (West, 2006: 283). In 1988 the Education Reform Act set out a National Curriculum for England and Wales to raise the standards in schools. Although it applies only to students of statutory school age, it has influenced the programmes offered to pre-school children. Consequently, government intervention has increased and teachers' autonomy has decreased (Kwon, 2002). The Children Act in 1989 considered the welfare of children as paramount and emphasised the importance of cooperation between social services and education departments at the local level. It also gave more attention to children having special needs and stated that local authorities should provide them with good services and place them into mainstream schools wherever possible (Graham and Santer, 2000). In 1990 the Rumbold Report (DES, 1990), *Starting with Quality*, was published. It discussed issues concerned with the quantity and quality of the nursery provision emphasising the importance of expanding high quality services to meet the needs of children and their parents. In 1994 the *Start Right* report (Ball, 1994: 6) criticised the government for neglecting young children and stressed the importance of early learning describing the investment in it as 'the best investment a nation can make'. The report called for high quality part-time nursery education for children aged 3 to 5, and full-time schooling for children aged 6. It also included 17 recommendations addressed to Parliament, the government, educators, parents and the community.

In her discussion of policy and practice in early years provision, Penn (2000a) explained that, historically, three strands of policy have existed: nursery education, childcare and welfare care. Nursery education has been provided for children aged 3 and 4 years by



qualified teachers as a free, part-time and school-based service. Childcare, which is a full-time care service for children aged between 0 and 5 years, has been provided by nursery nurses and unqualified staff in various private settings. Paying for this service has been parents' responsibility. Welfare care has been provided for vulnerable and poor children aged between 0 and 5 years. These three strands, as Penn pointed out, have been under review by the government. Some local authorities and voluntary organisations have attempted to provide nurseries that integrate all three strands and offer education as well as care. Drawing on an empirical research study carried out in 1995 to 1997 to investigate five integrated nurseries, Penn (2000a) explained that the different practices taking place in nursery education, childcare and welfare settings persisted even after the settings became integrated nurseries. The findings of the study revealed that although those nurseries claimed that they broadened what they had been offering, their actual practices reflected their organisational starting points. The different practices in the nurseries were informed by their different views of childhood. For instance, the nursery schools emphasised learning and they were staffed by qualified teachers assisted by nursery nurses and unqualified assistants or helpers, whereas the other nurseries registered by social services departments stressed care and surveillance, and were staffed by nursery nurses and unqualified assistants. In conclusion, Penn (2000a: 37) suggested that 'a more fundamental analysis of daily practice in nurseries is necessary to underpin any policy changes' criticising the constant changes that do not rely on fundamental review of the situation.

In 1996 the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority (SCAA) produced *Desirable Outcomes for Children's Learning on Entering Compulsory Education*. This document

applied to all pre-school provision in the private, voluntary and maintained sectors in England. It included six areas of learning: personal and social development, language and literacy, mathematics, knowledge and understanding of the world, physical development and creative development (SCAA, 1996). In 1998 the Green Paper *Meeting the Childcare Challenge* (DfEE, 1998) resulted in National Childcare Strategy consultation that acknowledged the links between care and education and intended to raise the quality of childcare, and to make it more affordable and more accessible. At the same year, 1998, the government's Sure Start programme was established to cover 250 disadvantaged areas by the end of 2001. It aimed to improve children's life opportunities before and after birth by providing good health services, early education and family support (Graham and Santer, 2000).

In 1999, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) replaced the desirable outcomes with learning goals that should be achieved by the end of the reception year, and published a booklet entitled *Early Learning Goals* (ELGs) (QCA/DfEE, 1999). In it the Foundation Stage was introduced to cover early education from age 3 to the end of the reception year. The introduction of the FS is considered a significant development in ECE in England as it recognises the importance of this period of children's age:

The period from age three to the end of the reception year is described as the foundation stage. It is a distinct stage and important both in its own right and in preparing children for later schooling. The early learning goals set out what is expected for most children by the end of the foundation stage (QCA/DfEE, 1999: 4).

Following the ELGs, the *Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage* (CGFS) was published in 2000 (QCA/DfEE, 2000). The Education Act 2002 extended the National Curriculum to include the FS, and the CGFS as a guide became statutory and hereby the



six areas of learning set out in it became statutory. The formal recognition of ECE as a key stage of children's education enhances the status of this stage and of early years practitioners (Hargreaves and Hopper, 2006). Since its publication till today, the CGFS has been the main resource that guides practitioners in their work in the FS. Moreover, the *Foundation Stage Profile* (FSP) (QCA/DfES, 2003) was introduced as the main assessment document in the FS. The profile has to be completed for each child by the end of the FS, the end of the reception year. More details about the guidance and the profile are given in the following two sub-sections which focus on the FS and good practice from the official point of view.

To conclude, this overview shows that there have been many changes in the early childhood provision in England over the last two decades. It seems that those changes have been based more on political imperatives than on a coherent educational vision. Recent curricular changes and official requirements of early years settings in particular have, undoubtedly, impacted on the practices taking place in those settings. Early years practitioners, as many researchers (for example, Moyles, 2001; Wood and Bennett, 2001; Adams et al., 2004; Aubrey, 2004; Miller and Smith, 2004; Osgood, 2006) suggest, are caught between implementing a curriculum which they think is appropriate for children and meets their needs and interests, and a curriculum that enables them to meet the official requirements. In other words, the recent political and curricular changes in the early years provision with what accompanied them of requirements which would be inspected are a double-edged sword. On the one hand, they raise and enhance the status of ECE and its practitioners. On the other hand, they result in a tension within early years practitioners and their settings between planning and implementing an informal



developmentally appropriate curriculum, and planning and implementing a formal outcome-oriented curriculum.

### **2.4.2. Importance and Aims of the Foundation Stage**

In his foreword for the CGFS (QCA/DfEE, 2000: 3) the Chief Executive of QCA, Nick Tate, states that:

The establishment of a foundation stage is a significant landmark in funded education in England. For the first time it gives this very important stage of education a distinct identity.

Although the FS starts from the age of 3, there are variations in the ages at which children join pre-school settings and later, year 1 (QCA/DfEE, 1999, 2000). Currently, the FS is ‘a statutory stage of the national curriculum for England, alongside key stages 1-4’ (QCA/DfEE, 2003: Foreword by Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Catherine Ashton). The aims of the FS are to support, foster, promote and develop children’s personal, social and emotional well-being, positive attitudes and dispositions towards their learning, social skills, attention skills and persistence, language and communication, reading and writing, mathematics, knowledge and understanding of the world, physical development and creative development (QCA/DfEE, 2000).

There are three main documents related to the FS: the *Early Learning Goals* (ELGs) (QCA/DfEE, 1999), the *Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage* (CGFS) (QCA/DfEE, 2000) and the *Foundation Stage Profile* (FSP) (QCA/DfES, 2003). The ELGs was published following the consultation on the review of the *Desirable Outcomes for Children’s Learning* (SCAA, 1996). It included the early learning goals that ‘most children are expected to achieve by the end of the reception year’ (QCA/DfEE, 1999: 3),

and it stated that these goals would replace the desirable learning outcomes from September 2000. The ELGs also introduced the FS, defined it, set out its aims and provided features of good practice for all FS settings. It, moreover, organised the FS curriculum into six areas of learning: personal, social and emotional development, language and literacy, mathematical development, knowledge and understanding of the world, physical development, and creative development. The areas are similar to those of *Desirable Outcomes for Children's Learning* (see p.51 of this Chapter) but with a positive addition of 'emotional development', and 'mathematics' is changed to 'mathematical development'. It was also noted in the ELGs that a detailed guidance was underway to be published in 2000. This guidance became the CGFS.

The CGFS (QCA/DfEE, 2000) incorporates and develops the ELGs, and adds more details and illustrative examples. In its foreword, the Parliamentary Under Secretary for Employment and Equal Opportunities, Margaret Hodge, states that the CGFS is 'comprehensive guidance for early years practitioners', 'the core reference document for the successful implementation of the foundation stage from September 2000', and it 'introduces the good practice that underpins effective early education' (QCA/DfEE, 2000: 2). The CGFS is intended 'to help practitioners plan to meet the diverse needs of all children so that most will achieve and some, where appropriate, will go beyond the early learning goals by the end of the foundation stage' (QCA/DfEE, 2000: 5). In it the FS curriculum is organised in the same six areas set out in ELGs but with a positive addition of the word 'communication' at the beginning of the language and literacy area. The guidance sets out the content of each area in three parts: stepping stones, examples of what children do, and what the practitioner needs to do.



The third document, the FSP (QCA/DfES, 2003), is an assessment document. It replaces the Baseline Assessment on entry to primary schools. It has been introduced for the practitioners to record ongoing developments made by each child and to provide a summary of the practitioner's knowledge of the child by the end of the reception year. The FSP builds on the CGFS and addresses the same six areas of learning as set out in the guidance. Within each of the first three curriculum areas (personal, social and emotional development, communication, language and literacy, and mathematical development), there are sub-areas which are then divided into nine smaller steps. Each of the other areas (knowledge and understanding of the world, physical development, and creative development) is also divided into nine steps. Thus, the FSP 'captures the early learning goals as a set of 13 assessment scales, each of which has nine points' (p.1). The practitioner should record each item the child has achieved in each scale and consider each point separately. Filling in the profile is assumed to start from the beginning of the FS and is to be completed by the end of the reception year which is the final year of the FS. It is assumed that practitioners build up their assessments of children's development on a cumulative basis throughout the year, and so the FSP is designed to reflect this ongoing process. As explained in the FSP, some schools may use their own record-keeping systems. Nevertheless, whether or not the schools use the FSP throughout the year, it should be finalised by the end of the reception year during the summer term.

### **2.4.3. Good Practice in the Foundation Stage**

Since the CGFS (QCA/DfEE, 2000: 2) is the main FS document, the 'comprehensive guidance' and 'the core reference' for practitioners in the FS, I have used it as the main reference for reporting the official view in this section. Yet, most of the points also exist



in the ELGs (QCA/DfEE, 1999) which was incorporated in the CGFS. The FSP (QCA/DfES, 2003), inevitably, comes to the fore when referring to assessment.

In the CGFS, the following principles of good practice in early years are listed:

- Effective education requires both a relevant curriculum and practitioners who understand and are able to implement the curriculum requirements.
- Effective education requires practitioners who understand that children develop rapidly during the early years – physically, intellectually, emotionally and socially.
- Practitioners should ensure that all children feel included, secure and valued.
- Early years experience should build on what children already know and can do.
- No child should be excluded or disadvantaged because of ethnicity, culture or religion, home language, family background, special educational needs, disability, gender or ability.
- Parents and practitioners should work together in an atmosphere of mutual respect within which children can have security and confidence.
- To be effective, an early years curriculum should be carefully structured.
- There should be opportunities for children to engage in activities planned by adults and also those that they plan or initiate themselves.
- Practitioners must be able to observe and respond appropriately to children.
- Well planned and purposeful activity and appropriate intervention by practitioners will engage children in the learning process and help them make progress.
- For children to have rich and stimulating experiences, the learning environment should be well planned and well organised.
- Above all, effective learning and development for young children requires high-quality care and education by practitioners.

(Adapted from QCA/DfEE, 2000: 11-12)

The CGFS recognises that ‘practitioners have a crucial role’ in children’s learning and development (p.6), and requires them to put those principles into practice in order to provide children with the best opportunities to promote their learning and development.

Therefore, according to the official view expressed in the guidance, practitioners are

required to understand how children develop physically, intellectually, emotionally and socially, and how they learn so that they can identify their needs and learning styles and plan diverse activities that cater for them. Furthermore, teachers need to establish positive relationships with parents and work in partnership with them to manage comfortable transition between home and early childhood setting and to build feelings of trust and respect with parents and children. They should also know about children's interests and previous experiences in order to employ them and build on what children know and can do. Moreover, they should be aware of special educational needs and differences in culture, religion, language and gender so as to consider them when treating children and to prepare materials and activities that cater for individual needs and interests within this diversity of abilities and cultures. In addition, practitioners need to have a clear awareness of the six areas of learning that constitute the FS curriculum. They should realise that every aspect of learning for children – personal, social, emotional, intellectual and physical – is interrelated and interdependent, and demonstrate this in planning the curriculum. They should be aware of the knowledge, understandings, skills and attitudes that children should acquire and the early learning goals they are expected to achieve by the end of the FS.

Practitioners should plan well-organised indoor and outdoor learning environment that involves children actively, helps them make sense of the world, includes activities initiated by them and others planned by practitioners to help children progress, and contains a wide range of equipment, materials and books readily and freely available, visible and accessible to children. Practitioners are required to design a print-rich environment that provides children with imaginative, enjoyable, stimulating and challenging experiences which are based on real life situations. They should make good



use of space and organise their time well so that they spend most of it working directly with children. Furthermore, the importance of play is recognised in the official documents. Thus, practitioners should know that ‘well-planned play, both indoors and outdoors, is a key way in which young children learn with enjoyment and challenge’ (QCA/DfEE, 2000: 25). They should not only support and extend children’s spontaneous play, but also plan and resource a play-based environment so as to extend children’s language and communication and support their learning through planned play activities that allow them to think imaginatively and creatively.

The ELGs, the CGFS and the FSP emphasise that practitioners should continuously undertake skilful and well-planned observations of children, and assess their development and progress. FSP in particular is based on observation, and reflects the important role of skilful observations in providing reliable information for the assessment of children. Observations of children individually or in groups can be recorded by practitioners in writing, photographs, or on audio or video tapes. From observations, practitioners should get an insight into children’s strengths, weaknesses and interests, and then review their plans to provide a balanced curriculum that takes into account children’s needs and interests. Assessing children’s progress by observing them, talking to them and assessing their paintings, drawings, designs, models and writing is essential in the FS. On the one hand, it gives insights into children’s achievements and helps identify early any learning difficulties, special educational needs and particular abilities. On the other hand, assessment helps practitioners evaluate their own practice and training needs and identify areas for improvement. Information gained from assessment should inform practitioners’



planning, help them reflect on and improve their own understanding and skills, and contribute to their professional development.

## **2.5. Summary and Conclusion**

In summary, this chapter has dealt with the literature related to this research study. Firstly, some research evidence on teacher thinking and beliefs and perspectives of practitioners working in ECE, especially in the FS, has been reviewed. Secondly, good educational practice in general and good early childhood practice in particular have been addressed. The focus, finally, has been shifted to the English context where this study took place, and an overview of the early years provision in England has been given and then the official view of the FS and good practice in it has been reported.

In conclusion, it is worth pointing out the following main points that have emerged from the three sections of research evidence presented in this chapter respectively. Firstly, there has been a notable increase in research on practitioners' thought processes. Most of this research, however, has been conducted with school-aged children. Even though there is an increasing interest in employing the interpretive paradigm and qualitative research approach, most studies which have investigated teacher beliefs and perspectives in the field of ECE have used surveys as the main research method. Secondly, good educational practice is conceptually and empirically problematic. Therefore, it should be addressed and discussed, especially from the perspectives of practitioners who are directly involved in it. In ECE, good practice is viewed as the practice that meets children's developmental needs and interests and effectively supports and promotes their personal, social, ethical, emotional, intellectual and physical development. Most literature that has addressed good

educational practice has given primacy to children's personal, social and ethical development considering it a necessary foundation of all aspects of children's learning and development. Thirdly, research shows that policy has had positive as well as negative impact on practice in early years settings. With regard to the FS in particular, its introduction is seen as an enhancement of the status of ECE and the practitioners working in it, but the requirements that accompanied it are perceived to be putting pressure on them. Despite the fact that the FS has been implemented in schools since 2000 (QCA/DfEE, 1999; 2000) and has become 'a statutory stage of the national curriculum for England, alongside key stages 1-4' (QCA/DfEE, 2003: Foreword), few studies have investigated the views of the practitioners working in it. All these considerations highlight the need for research that addresses early childhood practitioners' perspectives on good educational practice, particularly in the FS, in more depth. It is hoped that this study, in its aim and design, will be a contribution in this direction.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES**

True, only God can tell infallible humans the “real” nature of reality ... human grasp of reality never can be that of God’s, but hopefully research moves us increasingly toward a greater understanding of how the world works (Strauss and Corbin, 1998: 4).

#### **3.1. Introduction**

In the previous two chapters I have firstly thrown the light on the research background, importance, purpose and approach. Then, I have provided a review of some research evidence related to my research area. In this chapter I discuss the research methodology and procedures I have used in my study. Specifically, I will firstly give a relatively general methodological background to the research study, and secondly I will shed some light on grounded theory (GT) methodology and in-depth interviewing in terms of their epistemological roots, main features, value and limitations and some ethical issues associated with the in-depth interview. Then, I will explain how I have used them discussing the sampling technique, and data collection and analysis procedures. Finally, I will consider some problematic issues associated with qualitative research studies: validity, reliability, generalisability and the quantification of qualitative data, and how these apply to my study.

#### **3.2. Methodological Background**

It is generally accepted that there exist two major traditions of doing research: the positivist deductive quantitative model that aims at discovering generalisable laws in order to predict patterns in human actions, and the interpretive inductive qualitative model that aims at understanding and describing human actions from the actors’ perspectives. Since the 1970s a ‘qualitative revolution’ has been taking place in social



sciences and humanities (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998: vii). The positivist paradigm with its natural-science-based logic has been challenged by the interpretive paradigm (Aubrey et al., 2000). Educational research which is usually located within social sciences has been influenced by the early dominance of quantitative methodology and the later 'qualitative revolution'.

Over the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries, early childhood education, which was dominated by psychology, particularly developmental and behavioural psychology, has adhered to deductive quantitative approaches (Hatch, 1995; Aubrey et al., 2000). The construction and use of psychological and educational tests were significant features of the educational research in the early twentieth century. Aiming to build a theoretical base to the learning and teaching processes, researchers heavily used quantitative methods to measure children's achievement and the characteristics and attitudes of children and teachers (Aubrey et al., 2000). In the 1970s the heavy reliance on testing was criticised. Mehan (1973) (cited in Aubrey et al., 2000), for instance, criticised the validity of tests explaining that children could interpret questions in a different way from what was intended by researchers. He, moreover, drew attention to the influence of the testing context and children's attitudes. Similarly, Donaldson (1978), who criticised Piagetian tasks that indicate a child's stage of cognitive development, pointed out that the social testing context where interactions between children and adults occurred and the language used, had an impact on children's understanding of the requirements of the tasks. Such criticisms and the growing unease about the adequacy of quantitative research methods caused the rise of qualitative approaches to handle the complexity of human behaviour and relationships.

In recent years, many researchers think that quantitative and qualitative approaches can be combined (e.g. Bryman, 1988, 2004; Brannen, 1992, 2004; Hammersley, 1992; Hartley and Chesworth, 2000; Wilson and Natale, 2001; Silverman, 2005). Using either of these approaches or both depends mainly upon the research purpose. As Silverman (2005: 6) puts it, 'No method of research, quantitative or qualitative, is intrinsically better than any other'. Thus, I could say that these two approaches are often more polarised in theory than in research practice.

In terms of the study under consideration, since I think that research purpose should be given primacy regardless of all competing epistemologies which, using Guba and Lincoln's (1994: 108) words, 'are in all cases human constructions ... and hence subject to human error', I have advocated a qualitative approach using grounded theory (GT) methodology and in-depth interviewing. Having read extensively about different research methods and methodologies, I found that the in-depth interview and GT are the means that would enable me to have genuine access to practitioners' views about their own work with young children. My research purpose has been to investigate practitioners' views about good practice in the Foundation Stage (FS). I have sought the actors' perspectives about their own practice in an attempt to have a deeper understanding of what constitutes good practice in the FS and what influences it.

### **3.3. Grounded Theory (GT) Methodology**

Grounded theory (GT) is 'a general methodology for developing theory that is grounded in data systematically gathered and analyzed' (Strauss and Corbin, 1994: 273). GT was

formulated in the 1960s by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (1967) during their study of the treatment of dying patients in hospitals.

### **3.3.1. Epistemological Roots and Major Features of GT**

The Chicago school and the American pragmatism, particularly the writings of John Dewey, George Mead and Charles Peirce, contributed to the development of GT (Strauss, 1987). Glaser and Strauss (1967) offered a rationale for theories that are generated and developed through interplay with data. They viewed social phenomena as complex ones that cannot be understood and explained by deductive modes of enquiry alone. By their GT which includes guidelines and procedures for qualitative analysis, they aimed to gain a deeper understanding of social phenomena and to legitimate qualitative research which had been described as incapable of verification.

Strauss and Corbin (1990, 1998) developed a new version of GT that was criticised by Glaser who accused Strauss of transforming GT from a methodology to a set of methods and by ‘forcing’ data rather than letting theory emerge (Have, 2004). Currently, Strauss’s version is more popular than Glaser’s in doing qualitative research (Charmaz, 2000; Dey, 2004; Have, 2004). Stern (1994: 221) ‘a strict Glaserian’ admits that researchers following Glaser’s version are few. Charmaz (1994, 2000, 2002), who used GT with in-depth interviewing in her studies, explains that the epistemological roots of GT are in positivism and Chicago school sociology. Glaser’s Columbia university tradition of quantitative research imbues GT with ‘empiricism’ and ‘rigorous codified methods’ while Strauss’s Chicago tradition of interactionist enquiry gives it ‘its open-ended emphasis on process, meaning, action, and usefulness’ (Charmaz, 2002: 678). Proposing



a ‘constructivist version’ of GT, Charmaz (2000: 513) argues that GT has taken various forms since its appearance: Glaser’s objectivist form that endorses positivism and Strauss and Corbin’s form that ‘moves between objectivist and constructivist assumptions’.

Despite the existence of some differences among GT versions, all of them – Glaser’s, Strauss and Corbin’s and Charmaz’s – share the following features. Firstly, the means of collecting data are primarily, but not exclusively, qualitative such as interviews, field observations, audiotapes, videotapes, and all kinds of documents such as historical accounts, biographies, autobiographies, letters, diaries and media materials. Secondly, data collection and analysis run simultaneously and the theory evolves through continuous interplay between them. Thirdly, abstract categories are inductively constructed to explain and synthesise the social processes discovered within data. Fourthly, theoretical sampling is used to refine the categories through constant comparative analysis. Fifthly, themes that emerge through data analysis are pursued by further data collection which continues until the categories reach ‘theoretical saturation’ when new data no longer prompt refinement to them. Finally, categories are integrated into a theoretical framework (see Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987; Strauss and Corbin, 1990, 1994, 1998, Charmaz, 2002; Dey, 2004).

### **3.3.2. Value and Limitations of GT**

There seems a consensus among many researchers (e.g. Bryman, 1988; Denzin and Lincoln, 1994; Charmaz, 2000, 2002; Silverman, 2001, 2005; Boeije, 2002; Dey, 2004; Have, 2004) that GT has made an important contribution to qualitative research. They acknowledge its value and benefits for social research as it offers not only guidelines and

procedures that help in validating qualitative research, but also ‘a way of thinking about and viewing the world that can enrich the research’ (Strauss and Corbin, 1998: 4).

According to Denzin and Lincoln:

Grounded theory may be the most widely employed interpretive strategy in the social sciences today. It gives the researcher a specific set of steps to follow that are closely aligned with the canons of ‘good science’ (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994: 204).

Have (2004: 144) sees many advantages and strengths in GT such as its reinforcement of the idea that ‘qualitative social research involves an explicit dialogue of ideas and evidence and not just a possibly subjective description’, its emphasis on detailed analysis of data by making constant comparisons, memo writing and theoretical sampling, and its general principle that the researcher should be open-minded. However, he criticises its inductivist rhetoric arguing that analysis should involve a ‘confrontation’ of existing ideas and new evidence which leads to confirming these ideas, elaborating them or refuting them. He thinks that GT downplays the usefulness of existing literature and theories. Bryman (1988) and Silverman (2001, 2005) acknowledge the creative theory generation that GT offers, but argue that if it is used unintelligently, it can lead to empty frameworks. Some critics argue that GT is ‘unclear’ and ‘vague’ with respect to theory verification (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994; Silverman, 2001, 2005).

### **3.4. In-Depth Interviewing**

Interviewing as a research method, Gubrium and Holstein (2002) suggest, has a variety of forms and a very rich and varied history across different disciplines. In-depth interviewing, sometimes referred to as qualitative interviewing (e.g. Rubin and Rubin, 1995; Fielding and Thomas, 2001; Charmaz, 2002; Tierney and Dilley, 2002; Warren,



2002; Bryman, 2004), active interviewing (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995, 2002, 2004) or creative interviewing (Douglas, 1985), is one of these forms that can be either unstructured or semi-structured (Rubin and Rubin, 1995; Robson, 2002; Bryman, 2004).

### **3.4.1. Epistemological Underpinnings and Major Features of In-Depth Interviewing**

At the epistemological level, the in-depth interview is an interpretive method that draws upon constructionist and feminist assumptions (Rubin and Rubin, 1995; Charmaz, 2002; Warren, 2002). As an interpretive method, in-depth interviewing is characterised by the following points which are discussed by many researchers (e.g. Holstein and Gubrium, 1995, 2002; Rubin and Rubin, 1995; Charmaz, 2002; Johnson, 2002; Warren, 2002; Bryman, 2004). Firstly, in-depth interviewing advocates the emic point of view as by using it the researcher aims to understand respondents' worlds from their own viewpoints. Secondly, the researcher is not neutral or value free but actively involved in constructing meaning with interviewees. Thirdly, researchers usually employ non-probability sampling. The number of the interviews depends on the nature of the research question and the information sought. The samples are often convenience or opportunistic depending on the availability of certain people, gaining access to them and having their consent. In qualitative research in general, purposive sampling in which people most relevant to the research questions are sought to get rich data is recommended. Examples of this kind of sampling are snowball and theoretical sampling. Finally, when using in-depth interviewing as the sole source of data and since the researcher does not employ probability sampling, his/her aim is not to make generalisations, but to understand, describe and explain the complexity of the subject matter he/she is studying.



### **3.4.2. Value and Limitations of In-Depth Interviewing**

The in-depth interview has many strengths and limitations. Its major value is that it can be used to obtain rich, deep and detailed information that cannot be gathered by other research methods. By the in-depth interview the researcher can obtain a profound understanding of interviewees' thoughts, feelings and insights concerning the research topic (Rubin and Rubin, 1995; Fielding and Thomas, 2001; Johnson, 2002; Robson, 2002; Tierney and Dilley, 2002; Bryman, 2004). Unlike survey interviewing, in-depth interviewing does not restrict the interviewer to a specific set of questions that he/she imposes on interviewees. It is flexible as the interviewer can depart from the interview guide, ask follow-up questions and even adjust the emphases of the study as a result of the emergence of important significant issues in the interviewees' responses (Bryman, 2004). Moreover, in-depth interviews, as Holstein and Gubrium (1995: 4) suggest, are 'interpretively active' and 'reality-constructing, meaning making occasions' in which both interviewees and interviewers interact and construct meaning. This point, while seen as a strength of qualitative interviewing by Holstein and Gubrium and some other researchers (e.g. Douglas, 1985; Rubin and Rubin, 1995; Charmaz, 2002; Johnson, 2002; Warren, 2002), is considered a limitation by Silverman (2001: 87) who argues that this engagement in meaning construction 'stands in the way of accurate depictions of 'facts' or 'experiences''.

One of the limitations of in-depth interviewing is that the nature, the depth and the truthfulness of the data obtained are highly dependent on the conduct of the interviews, interviewer's awareness of his/her biases and his/her competence and interpersonal skills (Rubin and Rubin, 1995; Fielding and Thomas, 2001; Johnson, 2002; Robson, 2002;

Bryman, 2004). Because of the important role the interviewer plays, many characteristics are seen as necessary for him/her. For Douglas (1985), to be 'a creative interviewer', one should have a motivation to explore human beings and should be able to use strategies of interaction that optimise cooperation, trust and mutual disclosure. Taking generously from feminism, Rubin and Rubin (1995) stress the importance of the interviewer's empathy, sensitivity and emotional involvement. Furthermore, Fontana and Frey (2000) emphasise the importance of establishing rapport, gaining trust and knowing how to present oneself to the respondents. Kvale (1996) (cited in Bryman, 2004: 325) proposes a list of ten criteria of a successful interviewer. According to this list, the interviewer should be knowledgeable, structuring, clear, gentle, sensitive, open, steering, critical, remembering and interpreting. In addition to the interviewer's characteristics, the issue of the interviewer's gender has been raised. Johnson (2002), for instance, argues that gender is important in interviewing but he does not explain the nature of that importance. He gives as an example the feminist viewpoint that women should be interviewed by women because men cannot understand women accurately as they interpret their responses according to male standards. This perspective, however, as Warren (2002) discusses, is disputed even by some feminist researchers who argue that women do not share the same standpoints. The idea of women interviewing women and sharing similar standpoints, Warren points out, raises complicated issues as whether a religious can interview a secular, a heterosexual can interview a homosexual and so on.

### **3.4.3. Ethical Issues**

There are no international regulations of ethical criteria in research (Ryen, 2004). Yet, professional organisations such as the British Educational Research Association (BERA),



the British Sociological Association (BSA) and the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) have ethical guidelines and standards that should be adhered to. The major issues frequently raised in ethical discourse when research involves human participants are consent and confidentiality in order to protect participants' rights and dignity. Ethical considerations associated with qualitative research have been discussed by many researchers (e.g. Punch, 1994; Bryman, 2004; Ryen, 2004; Silverman, 2005). In some research studies ethical issues are more prominent than in others based on the sensitivity of the research topic and the nature and the age of the participants (Silverman, 2005).

As for in-depth interviewing, because it usually elicits interviewees' personal perceptions, feelings and reflections, Rubin and Rubin (1995) and Johnson (2002) discuss some of the ethical issues that should be considered. Firstly, the researcher should obtain participants' consent. He/she should honestly tell them about the purpose, the nature and the intended use of the research. He/she should also take their permission to record the interviews. Secondly, the researcher should keep his/her promise of confidentiality to protect interviewees from any possible harm. He/she should not reveal their identity or locations, even if this requires him/her to change or leave out some data. Finally, the researcher should tell the truth when writing research texts. Regardless of his/her standpoint, the researcher should report what interviewees have said, and when possible, take his/her interpretations of what they have said to them to get their impressions and comments. This point ties in with what Ryen (2004) refers to as trust between the researcher and the participants where the participants are truthful in what they say and the researcher is truthful in what he/she reports, and so no one deceives the other.



### 3.5. Theoretical Sampling and Study Participants

Before I started fieldwork in this study I had the chance to visit many early years settings in Newcastle during the taught part of my programme. In those visits I noticed that all the practitioners working in the FS in all of the nursery and primary schools I visited are women, and I really did not hear of any setting where there are men working directly with children in the FS. Therefore, since early childhood institutions are mostly staffed by women and the work is seen as a woman's job (Cannella, 1997; Edgington, 1998; Penn, 2000b; Moyles, 2001; Hargreaves and Hopper, 2006), I decided that all the study participants would be women. From the viewpoint of some feminist researchers who hold that a woman can understand and interpret women's meanings better than men, my being a woman is an advantage in this study.

The population of the study has been teachers and nursery nurses who work in the FS in Newcastle. Since in-depth interviewing and GT were used, theoretical sampling recommended by Glaser and Strauss (1967), Strauss (1987), Strauss and Corbin (1990, 1998) and Charmaz (2002) was used. Theoretical sampling is 'sampling to develop the researcher's theory, not to represent the population' (Charmaz, 2002: 689). It is not predetermined but evolves during data collection and analysis as Strauss and Corbin state:

To say that one samples theoretically means that sampling, rather than being predetermined before beginning the research, evolves during the process. It is based on concepts that emerged from analysis and that appear to have relevance to the evolving theory. (Strauss and Corbin, 1998: 202)

Theoretical sampling entails sampling interviewees until the categories that are arrived at reach 'theoretical saturation' when new data no longer prompt refinement to them (Glaser

and Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987; Strauss and Corbin, 1990, 1998, Charmaz, 2002). On this basis I could have stopped sampling after the twelfth interview as the categories I arrived at had become saturated. Yet, I chose to continue interviewing more practitioners since theoretical sampling, according to Yin (1989) cited in Pandit (1996), can be used not only to extend the emerging theory but also to replicate previous cases to test the emerging theory. I also wanted to get a deeper understanding of the participants' world. In this respect, Johnson (2002) points out that when using in-depth interviewing there is no specific answer as to how many interviews need to be conducted. He suggests that the researcher should conduct 'enough' interviews that enable him/her to learn and understand what there is to be learnt. Furthermore, during the sampling process I approached early years settings in different areas across the socio-economic range, and practitioners of various years of experience because looking for variations in sampling is recommended in GT as it may densify the themes and maximise the opportunities for comparative analysis (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Having a list of all primary and nursery schools in Newcastle from the City Library and getting enough information about the schools from official websites helped me to decide which schools to approach at the initial stage to construct the categories and which ones to approach afterwards to develop those categories.

At the end of the sampling journey, I ended up with 21 participants: 12 teachers and 9 nursery nurses. The reason why the balance was in favour of teachers was that teachers' interviews were richer in themes as they raised issues related to themselves, to nursery nurses and to the entire early years context. This, I assume, is due to their ultimate responsibility about the classes and to their more theoretical knowledge because of the

initial and in-service training courses they have had. Table 1 shows the study participants arranged alphabetically by their pseudonyms which were used to ensure confidentiality. I have chosen to use first names throughout this thesis for several reasons. Firstly, during the interviews, the participants addressed me by my first name and asked me to address them by their first names. Secondly, after my immersion in the interviews through listening to them more than once, and transcribing and analysing them, I feel that I am close enough to the participants that I can be comfortable to use first names. Finally, in qualitative studies it has become accepted to write up research texts in a less formal style than that is used in quantitative studies (see for example, Hatch, 1995; Clandinin and Connelly, 2000).

Table 1: Study Participants

No.	Name	Profession	Age	Qualification(s)	Years of Teaching Experience
1	Alison	Teacher	57	First degree in Botany; PGCE (Postgraduate Certificate in Education) in primary education	26 years (from year 7 to reception; 12 years in reception)
2	Beatrice	Teacher	52	Teaching Diploma (3 years and the final year specialised in nursery)	30 years in nursery
3	Bridget	Nursery Nurse	47	NNEB (Nursery Nurse Examination Board)	6 years (3 years as a teaching assistant in primary classes, 1 year in reception and 2 years as a nursery nurse in nursery)
4	Caroline	Nursery Nurse	Above 40	Diploma in Play Work; Foundation Certificate in Education; NVQ (National Vocational Qualifications)	16 years in different settings (primary schools, community projects and nurseries; 6 years in early years)



5	Deborah	Nursery Nurse	Above 30	NNEB; foundation degree in Early Childhood Studies; currently doing BA Honours in Early Childhood Studies	18 years in nursery and reception
6	Diane	Teacher	29	BA Honours in Education	5 years in reception, nursery and year1
7	Jackie	Teacher	Above 40	PGCE in primary education; currently doing MA in the early years	20 years in nursery
8	Jane	Teacher	35	BA Honours in Education	14 years with different year groups from year 6 to reception; 4 years in reception with some classes in nursery
9	Janet	Teacher	47	First degree in Politics; PGCE in primary education	14 years (from year 5 to reception; 3 years in reception)
10	Jill	Nursery Nurse	21	NNEB; currently doing a degree in Early Childhood Studies	4 years in nursery
11	Joanna	Teacher	52	Teaching Certificate; currently doing MA in the early years	17 years in nursery and primary schools
12	Kay	Teacher	55	Teaching Certificate	24 years most of which are in reception
13	Maria	Nursery Nurse	51	NNEB	33 years most of which are in nursery and reception
14	Mary	Teacher	54	BA in English, Diploma in Education; Early Years course called 'From 3 to 7'	30 years 15 of which are in nursery and reception
15	Sarah	Teacher	42	BA in History and Women Studies; PGCE in primary education	6 years in reception and nursery
16	Shirley	Teacher	49	BA in Education	9 years (3 years with year1

					and 6 years with reception and nursery)
17	Tina	Nursery Nurse	Above 40	NNEB	More than 20 years in nursery, reception and primary classes; 14 years after being qualified
18	Tricia	Nursery Nurse	42	NNEB	23 years in reception
19	Valerie	Teacher	Above 25	BA in Combined Studies; PGCE in primary education	6 years (from year 4 to nursery; 1 year in nursery)
20	Victoria	Nursery Nurse	26	NNEB; NVQ	7 years in different nurseries
21	Yvette	Nursery Nurse	50	NNEB	14 years in nursery

### 3.6. Data Collection

The data used in the study under consideration were obtained from one-to-one in-depth interviews with 21 early years practitioners: 12 teachers and 9 nursery nurses. Taking ethical considerations into account I firstly approached the administrations of the participants’ schools and explained the research purpose. In most cases the school administrations showed willingness to cooperate provided that the practitioners concerned agreed to participate. When each administration had showed acceptance, I asked them about the practitioners’ years of experience and expressed my preference to talk to one or two of them. In some cases the school administrations left it to me to approach the practitioners and in other cases they said they would do that and get back to me. The administrations in three schools of the ones approached apologised that they were not able to cooperate at that time because they had a shortage of staff and their practitioners’ personal commitments would not enable them to stay after work hours.

After having obtained the practitioner's consent, we arranged an appointment for the interview. I did not limit the length of the interview but some practitioners told me in advance how much time they would be able to give me. Most of the interviews were conducted in the practitioners' classrooms after the children had left, and some took place within school time in a quiet room. One of the interviews was conducted in a school holiday as the teacher said that she would often come in holidays to do some work in the reception and nursery classrooms, and she preferred to meet me in a holiday which was very close to the date when I approached her. The length of the interviews varied from about an hour to an hour and a half except for one interview, Mary's interview, which was about three hours long and was done in two meetings. In the middle of the first meeting Mary said that she was able to give me two hours maximum at that day, but she also said that I did not need to rush in asking my questions as she had a lot to say and she would be willing to continue the interview in another time, and so at the end of the first meeting which lasted about an hour and a half we arranged another meeting. She also gave me a booklet she had written about their practice in the FS and a copy of the *Foundation Stage Profile* (FSP). Fortunately, at the end of most interviews, the participants showed me around their classrooms and the outdoor areas attached to them, children's photographs and work displayed on walls, some of the activities they do and sometimes some of the paperwork they had to do.

Each interview was audio-recorded, transcribed and analysed before conducting the following one in order to sample theoretically to develop and extend the emerging categories. Two examples of the interview transcripts are given in Appendix B. Since I did not want to start my study with any preconceived assumptions about practice in the



FS and I wanted the research themes to come from the practitioners themselves, a major feature of the interviews was the organic nature of questions. The main question I asked was: ‘Tell me about your practice in the FS. How do you support children’s learning and development?’ I allowed the practitioners the time they needed to talk about their practice without interruption making mental notes of what they were saying and then asking follow-up questions to elicit more information. I also used prompts to explore the categories that had emerged from earlier interviews.

According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), a GT researcher should be open-minded and sensitive to the issues raised by research participants. He/she should also ask questions about the data, look for possible readings, compare between the emerging categories, discover relationships between them and integrate them. He/she should do that from the first interview till the writing of the research text. Trying to be such a researcher, from my ongoing analysis of the interviews I found that the categories that emerged can be related to three major themes or central categories. The meaning of a central category in GT is discussed in the following data analysis section. The major themes were: *Features of Good Practice*, *Enhancing/Supportive Factors* and *Difficulties*. Based on these themes, I narrowed the relatively broad question with which I began my research: ‘How do practitioners view good practice in the Foundation Stage?’ by forming the following three questions to be asked in this research study:

- What are the features of good practice in the Foundation Stage from practitioners’ point of view?
- What are the factors that enhance/support good practice in the Foundation Stage?
- What are the difficulties that practitioners face in the Foundation Stage?

To answer these questions and develop the three themes, I added the following two main interview questions to the main initial question given above:

- What are the factors/things that help you work well with the children?
- What are the difficulties that you face in your work in the Foundation Stage?

Follow-up questions and prompts continued to be used to develop and extend the categories included within each of the three major themes.

### **3.7. Data Analysis**

To analyse the large bulk of data obtained from the interviews, Strauss and Corbin's (1998) approach was used as it provides systematic rigorous procedures for qualitative analysis. The analysis was facilitated by the use of NUD\*IST (Non-numerical Unstructured Data: Indexing, Searching and Theorising) Version 6 (N6) software package which provides a means of managing qualitative data, retrieving texts, and organising and relating categories. For readers who have not used NUD\*IST, Figures 3-5, which display illustrative screen prints of my project, may give them an idea about N6 and help them understand my references to the analytical process within the software<sup>1</sup>. When the user opens a project in N6, he/she has two windows: Document Explorer and Node Explorer as Figure 3 illustrates. In the Document Explorer displayed in Figure 4, the analyst can store, edit and retrieve documents (e.g. interview transcripts), record factual information, write and edit memos about them, and search for words and phrases in them. In the Node Explorer showed in Figure 5, the analyst can create nodes (codes), code data at the nodes created, make changes in the nodes as concepts and

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<sup>1</sup> For more information on how to use N6, there is a tutorial that the user can select when he/she first runs the programme. Moreover, the QSR website [www.qsrinternational.com](http://www.qsrinternational.com) provides a free handbook for N6 that can be downloaded. The website also provides information about the latest updates of the software.

categories develop, record ideas about the nodes in memos, and search for links between nodes.

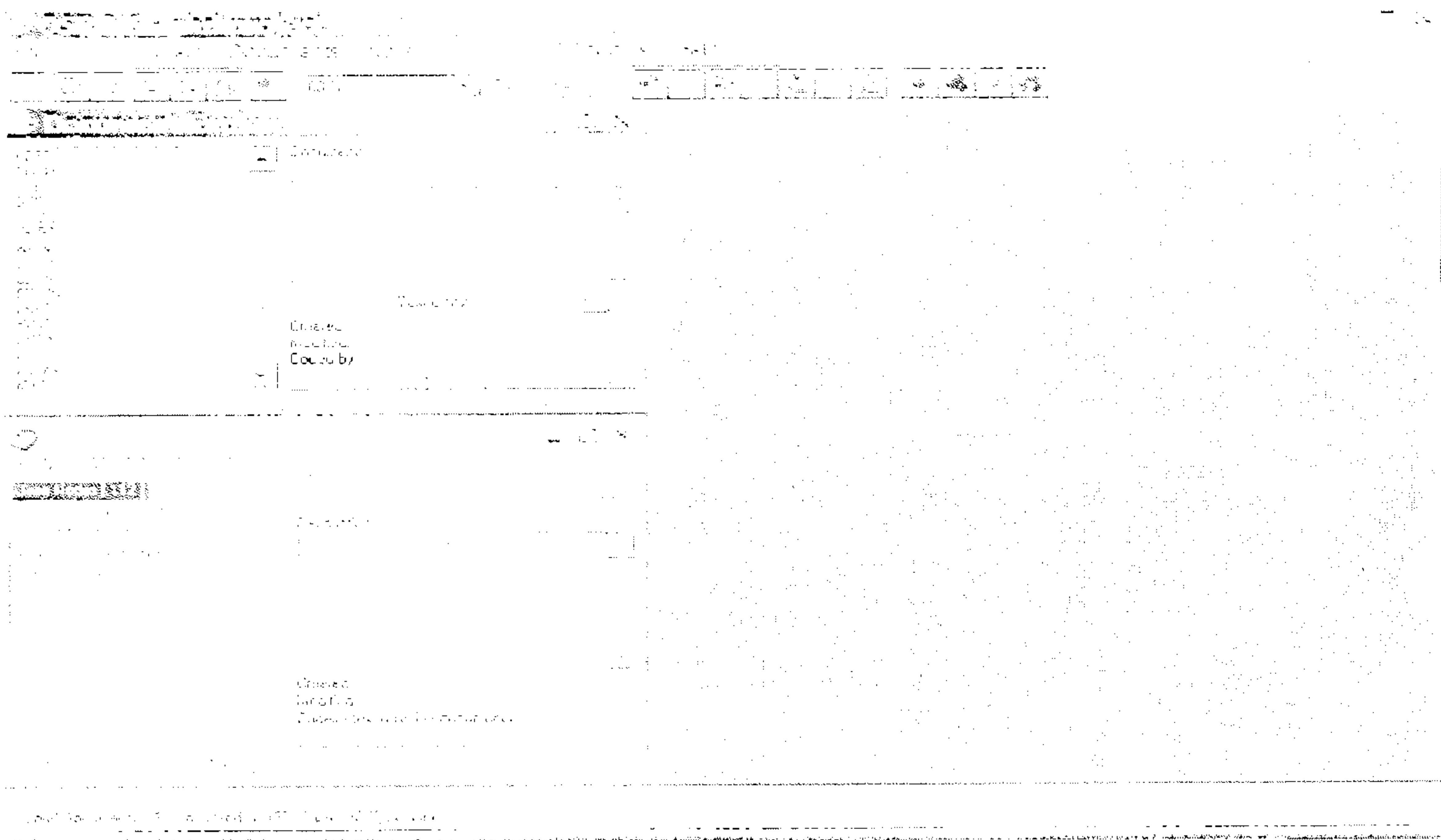


Figure 3: Document Explorer and Node Explorer in N6

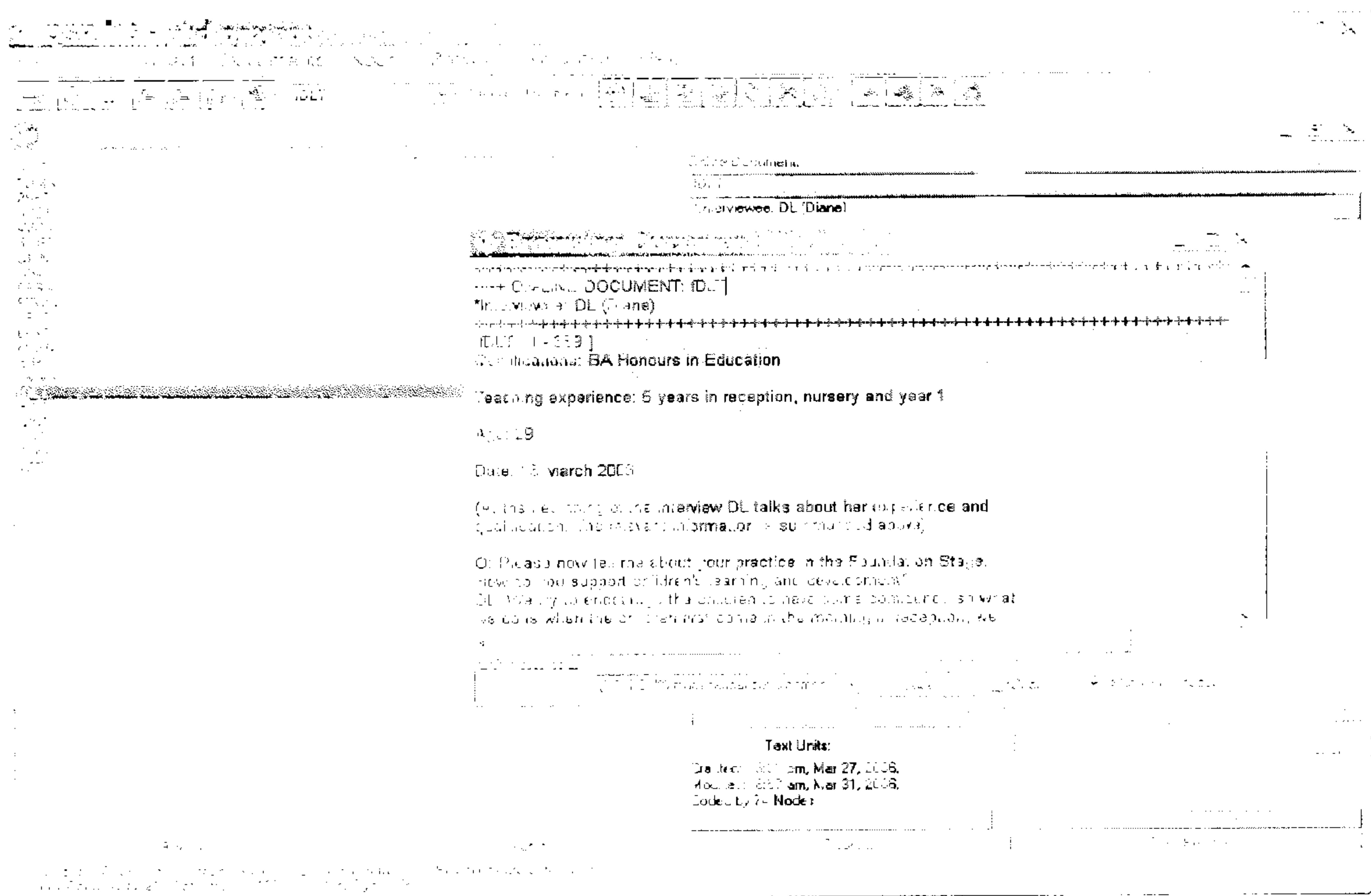
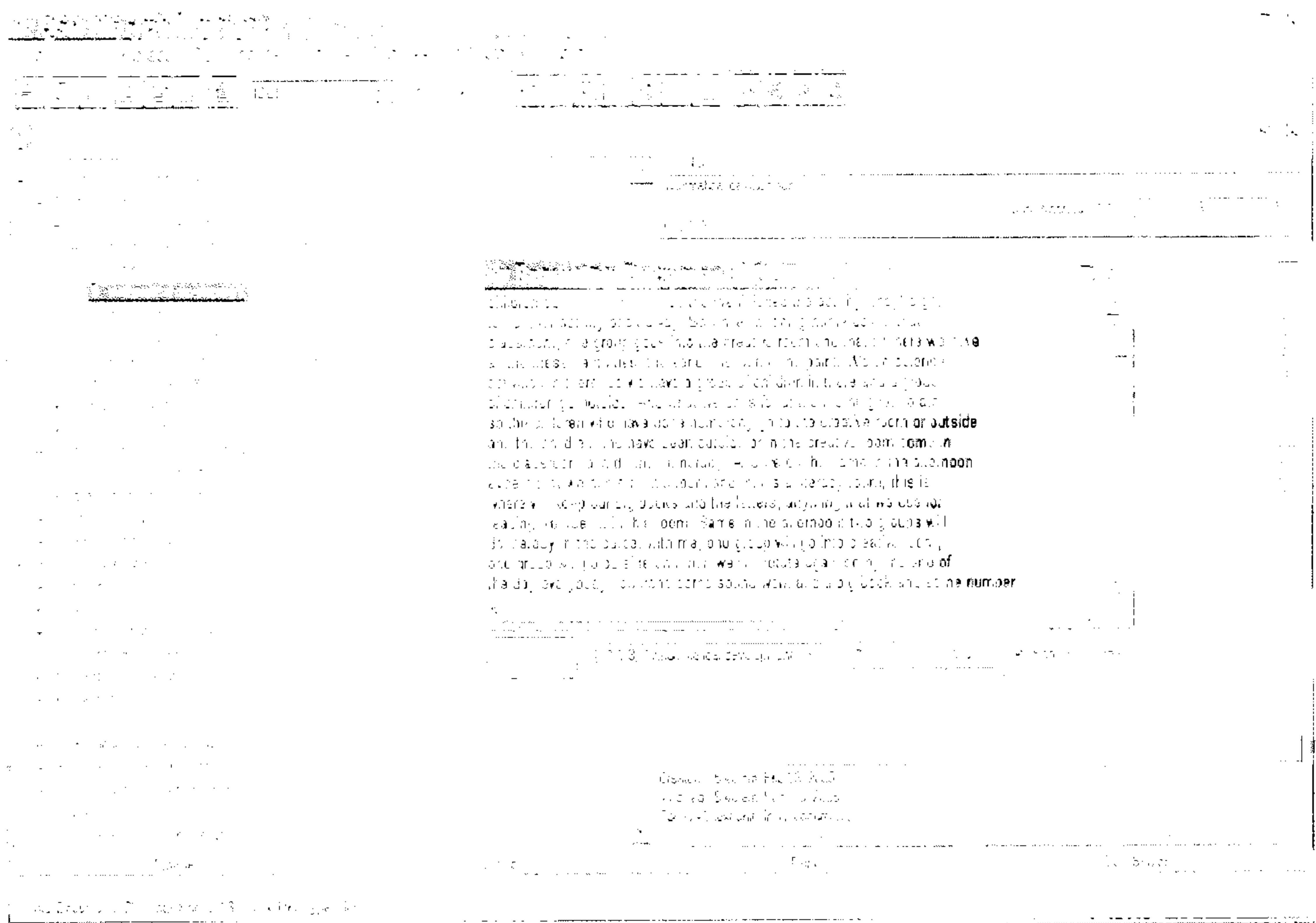


Figure 4: A View of the Document Explorer Showing the Names of the Interview Transcripts and a Browse through a Transcript





**Figure 5: A View of the Node Explorer Showing the Categories and a Browse through a Transcript to Highlight and Code at One of the Categories**

The basic elements of theory building are conceptualising the raw data, discovering categories and integrating them. To generate concepts and to discover, develop and integrate categories, I used the following GT procedures: open, axial and selective coding, constant comparative analysis, memo writing and diagramming. These procedures with theoretical sampling are the main strengths of the GT (Have, 2004; Charmaz, 2002). The first step of theory building is generating concepts which is done using open coding. However, it does not follow that these procedures are used in a strict consecutive manner starting with open coding, moving to axial coding, then to selective coding and so on. Once a set of concepts are generated from the first interview, these analytic procedures are used integratedly depending on the analytic need:

... analysis is *not* a structured, static, or rigid process [italics in the original]. Rather, it is a free-flowing and creative one in which analysts move quickly back and forth between types of coding, using analytic techniques and procedures freely and in response to the analytic task before analysts (Strauss and Corbin, 1998: 58).

In the following pages I explain these analytic procedures and how I used them with illustrations from the data. I split these procedures into sections for more clarification and enhancement of text readability. Yet, due to the integrated nature of GT analysis, overlaps between the sections are likely to occur.

### **3.7.1. Coding Techniques and Constant Comparative Analysis**

There are three types of coding in GT: open, axial and selective coding. Open coding refers to the process of identifying concepts, axial coding is the ‘process of relating categories to their subcategories’ (Strauss and Corbin, 1998: 123), and selective coding refers to the process of integration and refinement of categories. As for the constant comparative analysis, it is done through the three types of coding as it indicates making systematic comparisons between and within data texts and between and within categories and subcategories. Constant comparative analysis enhances the validity of the findings and thus the rigour of qualitative research as discussed later in this chapter.

#### **3.7.1.1. Open Coding**

Open coding is the process in which concepts that constitute the basic building blocks of theory are identified. It deals with labelling phenomena as indicated by the data. Open coding is best done through microanalysis, that is line-by-line analysis, which is necessary at the beginning of research in order to generate initial categories (Strauss and



Corbin, 1998). The following is an extract from one of the interviews to illustrate how open coding has been done. The conceptual labels are in italics between parentheses:

The Foundation Stage in this school is mixed of reception and nursery together. We have myself as a teacher and two nursery nurses to support. Most of the curriculum is done through PLAY activities (*play-based curriculum*), so the children learn from being together, from adult input .. em from activities designed (*focused activities*) to make them ask questions, basically to get them thinking and learning for themselves (*personal, social and emotional development: self-confidence and self-esteem*). Em .. reception HAS to have a more focused curriculum (*pressure on practitioners and children*) where we have to do literacy (*communication, language and literacy*) and numeracy (*mathematical development*), probably as a separate part of the Foundation Stage. But all other subjects are mixed together (*integrated curriculum*) and they are done mainly through play activities (*play-based curriculum*), so children sometimes don't even know that they are learning and it's enjoyable so that they want to come to school; they want to learn (*personal, social and emotional development: happiness and positive disposition towards learning*); they want to be with their friends (*personal, social and emotional development: making friendships*) and so it makes a nice experience to them.

This microanalysis was facilitated by NUD\*IST software. For instance, when the concept 'play-based curriculum' first emerged, it was typed as a node in the Node Explorer and the part of the interview transcript that indicated it was highlighted and coded at that concept. When another part of the same interview or the subsequent interviews indicated the same concept, I clicked on the concept 'play-based curriculum' in the Node Explorer, highlighted the interview text that indicated it and then clicked on 'Code'. At any phase of the analysis, when clicking on any concept or category then on 'Browse' in the Node Explorer, all extracts from the interview transcripts that were coded at that concept or category would appear in the screen with the description of the transcripts from which each extract was taken. This facility was helpful in making constant comparisons between interview transcripts within the same category and between different categories and subcategories. As for the names or the labels given to the concepts, some of them



were taken from the participants' own words and some were suggested by the early years context and the literature related to it.

After having a set of conceptual labels, by examining and comparing them, I grouped the concepts which are related in meaning or conceptually similar under more abstract or higher level concepts that are termed categories. For example, in the previous interview extract *communication, language and literacy, mathematical development* and *personal, social and emotional development* are related in that they are all areas of children's development and of the FS curriculum, therefore, I grouped them under one category which is *supporting children's development in the curriculum areas*, and so I related this category to three subcategories. By doing this, I integrated open and axial coding.

### 3.7.1.2. Axial Coding

Axial coding is the analytic process in which categories are related to their subcategories. In axial coding, through constant comparisons, categories and subcategories are linked and continue to systematically develop as new data are collected. Thus, as more data are collected a concept may stand by itself as a category, be grouped with other concepts as subcategories or/and be extended into subcategories, or be dropped. These possibilities are not done haphazardly but are all based on what the data yield, and on the constant comparisons within data and categories.

To further clarify axial coding, here are two examples from the study under consideration. At the initial stages of analysis *personal, social and emotional development* had been a subcategory without subcategories related to it. As more data

were obtained and more extracts were coded, I found that in comparison with other subcategories, *personal, social and emotional development* included a high number of extracts. Looking into these extracts and comparing them, I discovered that they represent various aspects of children's personal, social and emotional development. Therefore, I extended this subcategory into the following five sub-subcategories: *self-confidence and self-esteem; happiness and positive disposition towards learning; learning routines; sharing, working in groups and making friendships, and trusting practitioners and interacting with them*. I also coded the extracts at the sub-subcategories which they represent. Another example of axial coding is what was done with *practitioners' personal qualities* category. Firstly, *patience and open mindedness and flexibility* emerged as concepts which I grouped under *practitioners' personal qualities*. Then, as more sampling and more data collection took place, *sense of humour and interpersonal skills* emerged and were added as subcategories to it. Later, *organisation and work experience* were revealed and added.

### 3.7.1.3. Selective Coding

The third type of coding is selective coding which refers to 'the process of integrating and refining categories' (Strauss and Corbin, 1998: 143). Like all other GT analytic processes, selective coding is a continuous process that occurs in conjunction with other processes from the beginning of the study until the end:

... integration is an ongoing process that occurs over time. One might say that it begins with the first bit of analysis and does not end until the final writing. As with all phases of analysis, integration is an interaction between the analyst and the data (Strauss and Corbin, 1998: 144).

The first step of integration, as Strauss and Corbin (1998) explain, is deciding on the central categories that represent the main themes of the research. The central category, Strauss and Corbin (1998: 146) state, 'represents the main theme of the research', 'evolves from the research' and it has an 'analytic power' that stems from 'its ability to pull the other categories together to form an explanatory whole'. As noted earlier in this chapter I discovered three major themes: *Features of Good Practice* in the FS, *Enhancing/Supportive Factors* of good practice and *Difficulties* that practitioners face in their work. Using the categories that emerged, I identified these major themes. Once I did that, I refined the categories by extending the extremely dense categories when this was possible, filling in poorly developed categories and dropping 'extraneous concepts' which 'lead nowhere or contribute little' to the theoretical framework (Strauss and Corbin, 1998: 159). This was done through further theoretical sampling which continued even after the saturation of the categories.

There are many examples of highly dense categories that were extended to subcategories such as *personal, social and emotional development, classroom environment and organisation, parental involvement, training, and practitioners' personal qualities*. Examples of poorly developed categories were *children with English as an additional language (EAL)* and *social deprivation and poverty* as I noticed that the number of the coded extracts within each of them was relatively small in comparison with the other categories. Therefore, sampling theoretically, I decided to interview practitioners in schools that are located in deprived areas and in areas populated by non-English families. Examples of too poorly developed categories that were dropped are *training as an additional workload* and *part-time children* and *children with special needs* as difficulties



because most participants did not see them as such. As for training, most practitioners did not see it as a workload because most courses were usually held within school work hours. With regard to part time children and children with special needs, most schools either did not have such children or had a very small number. A member of the early years staff usually gave the part-time children any focused activity they had missed while full-time children were doing free choice activities. For children with special needs, schools were provided with specialists and necessary facilities from local authorities and Sure Start.

### **3.7.2. Memos**

Writing memos is one of the main strengths of the GT (Have, 2004; Charmaz, 2002). Memos in GT refer to ‘written records of analysis that may vary in type and form’ (Strauss and Corbin, 1998: 217). Strauss and Corbin (1998: 218) suggest that memos are important in the analysis as they ‘serve the dual purpose of keeping the research grounded and maintaining that awareness for the researcher’. They identify three main forms of memos: ‘code notes’ that contain the products of the open, axial and selective coding, ‘theoretical notes’ that include the researcher’s thoughts and ideas about sampling and any other issues, and ‘operational notes’ that contain reminders and directions for the researcher. They, however, point out that a single memo may include elements of any of the three forms. As all GT analytic procedures, writing memos begins with the initial stages of the analysis and continues throughout the research study. According to Charmaz (2002), memos link data collection, data analysis and writing research texts.

In my writing of memos in this study I was not concerned about their form; neither did I write memos for their own sake. I wrote memos that I thought would help me in data gathering and analysis and in writing research texts. NUD\*IST software assisted me in writing memos, particularly code notes and operational notes as it has the facility of making reports about the products of analysis. After having analysed each interview I made a report and wrote notes on the report about the categories: which categories were dense, which ones were poor, which ones seemed to saturate, which ones were related and so on. Based on these reports I wrote notes that directed me to where I should sample to develop the theoretical framework. Moreover, throughout the research process when I had some thoughts or insights inspired by the participants' talk and my analysis of them or even by the places I had been in to conduct the interviews, I captured these thoughts on papers as memos. Even though GT memos are meant to be analytical rather than descriptive (Strauss and Corbin, 1998), some of the theoretical memos I wrote include elements of description. Yet, it is a description that I would call analytic description. The following is an example of a memo I wrote about Bridget's interview and is related to the *low status of early childhood education* category:

*Bridget's talk about her job as a nursery nurse indicates that she herself feels that it is of a low status. However, what has happened and is happening in her life outside the school - having stayed at home to raise her own children and loving to spend time with her husband at that 'old' age - make her satisfied with her job and unwilling to change it or to think of any kind of professional development. Moreover, the passionate way in which Bridget talked about her practice with children and the language she spoke were more that of a mother than of a professional. In her words and tone of voice I could see that her personal life and experiences have considerably influenced her professional life theoretically and practically.*



### 3.7.3. Diagrams

Diagrams in the GT approach are ‘visual devices that depict the relationships among concepts’ (Strauss and Corbin, 1998: 217). As Strauss and Corbin (1998) explain, diagramming begins with initial analysis and evolves during the research process. Nevertheless, in the early stages of open coding when the relationships between concepts have not yet been revealed, the researcher might not draw diagrams. During axial and selective coding, integrative diagrams can be drawn to depict the relationships between the emerging categories and their subcategories. Figure 6 shows an example of the diagrams I drew during the analysis process. It illustrates the *Foundation Stage Curriculum* category and its subcategories. The diagrams I used are similar to the networks used by Bliss et al. (1983) (cited in Mercer, 1996) in their Systemic Network Analysis technique. Although Bliss et al. have moved from the left-hand side of the page in their creation of networks, they have made it clear that the other way may be better as it is closer to the data the categories represent. In Mercer’s (1996) study of job satisfaction of secondary school head teachers, in which he used the in-depth interview with the GT approach, and in this study, the networks have been created starting from the right-hand side. Yet, some dense subcategories such as *personal, social and emotional development* were extended in later phases of the analysis into further subcategories related to them. The final diagrams will be presented in Chapters 4 and 5 in which the research findings will be presented and discussed. According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), integrative diagrams can demonstrate a graphic representation of the whole theoretical framework that has been arrived at or different parts of it. A diagram can illustrate all themes and their subcategories or one major theme and its subcategories. As



memos, Strauss and Corbin explain, diagrams are useful in conceptualising and writing research texts.

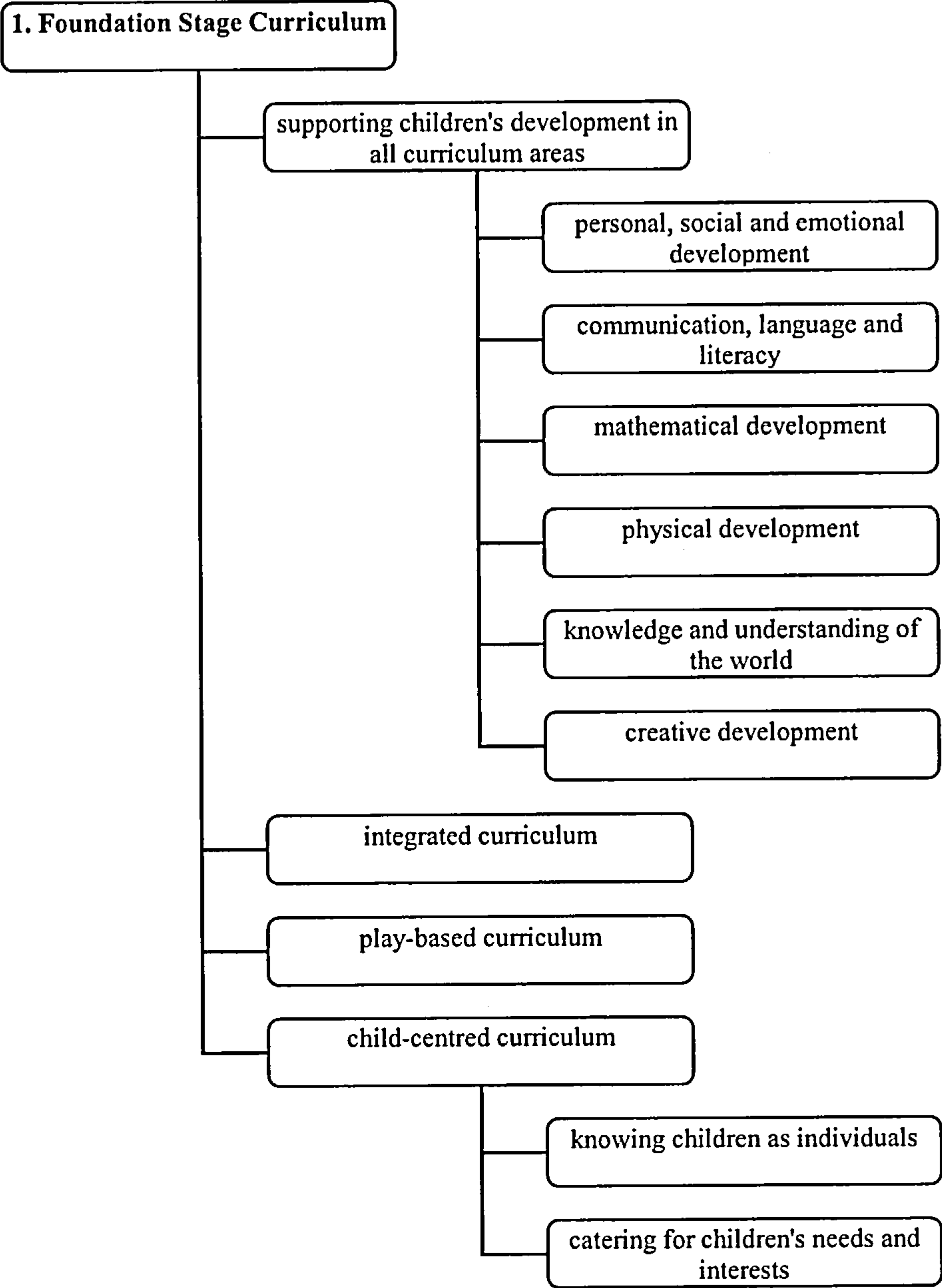


Figure 6: A Diagram of the *Foundation Stage Curriculum* Category

### **3.8. Validity, Reliability and Generalisability**

Validity, reliability and generalisability are ones of the problematic issues associated with qualitative research. Seale et al. (2004) and Silverman (2005) discuss the point that some qualitative researchers dismiss those issues as positivist concerns that are related to quantitative studies. Janesick (1994) questions the ‘trinity’ of validity, reliability and generalisability, criticising the psychometric assumption that researchers are to adhere to this trinity. Janesick (1994: 217) argues that researchers ‘have lost the human and passionate element of research’ because of their concerns about ‘this trinity of psychometrica’. Cohen et al. (2000), however, suggest that those issues are requirements for quantitative as well as qualitative studies, but they can be addressed differently in qualitative research.

#### **3.8.1. Validity and Reliability**

A major issue associated with qualitative research studies is that of convincing the audience that the research findings have validity (Cohen et al., 2000; Seale et al., 2004; Silverman, 2005). Silverman (2005) discusses some techniques that ensure validity and reliability in qualitative research. Many of these techniques agree with the GT approach. Since its appearance, GT has dealt with these issues and offered rigorous procedures of doing qualitative research (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987; Strauss and Corbin, 1990, 1998). Concerning reliability in particular, Strauss and Corbin (1998) think that it is difficult to be achieved as in quantitative studies because it is not possible to replicate the conditions under which data were gathered. They, however, suggest another way of rethinking reliability:

Given the same theoretical perspective of the original researcher, following the same general rules for data gathering and analysis, and assuming a similar set of conditions, other researchers should be able to come up with either the same or a very similar theoretical explanation about the phenomenon under investigation. The same problems and issues should arise regardless of whether they are conceptualised and integrated a little differently. Whatever discrepancies arise usually can be explained through reexamination of the data and identification of the alternative conditions that may be operating in each case (Strauss and Corbin, 1998: 266-267).

Before discussing the techniques I used to ensure my research validity and reliability, I would point out that, as Strauss and Corbin (1998: 43) suggest, 'a state of complete objectivity is impossible' in any research study, whether qualitative or quantitative, as no researcher can completely divorce himself/herself from his/her beliefs, values, feelings and experiences. I think in any piece of research there is an element of subjectivity. It could be in the choice of the topic or the method, or perhaps in the way the researcher sees the data and the findings and interprets them. Sometimes this is a strength in the research as the researcher needs to be sensitive to the issues being investigated. Yet, what is important, as Strauss and Corbin (1998) comment, is to keep a balance between objectivity and sensitivity. Objectivity is essential to hear respondents accurately and give them a voice, and to recognise own biases and control their intrusion into the interpretation of data. Sensitivity is also necessary to perceive the profound meanings and nuances and recognise the connections in data.

To maintain a balance between objectivity and sensitivity, to avoid the limitations of the GT referred to in section 3.3.2 and to achieve validity and reliability in my study I used the techniques suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1998) and that tie in with what



Silverman (2005) discusses. These techniques are: making constant comparisons, checking with respondents (respondent validation), maintaining an attitude of scepticism and gathering more data. Throughout the study I was engaged in ongoing comparative analysis between and within the interviews to maintain the findings grounded on them. However, due to my awareness that comparisons do not entirely remove the possible intrusion of bias into interpretations, I checked my interpretations of the interviews with the respondents. After having analysed all of the interviews, I wrote a summary of the categories coded from each interview and sent it to 11 respondents (6 teachers and 5 nursery nurses) to verify whether I had interpreted their talk accurately, and to give their comments on my interpretations. Two examples of summaries and participants' responses can be seen in Appendix C. Most responses to the summaries indicated that my interpretations were 'very accurate', and a few indicated that they were accurate. No new categories emerged from the respondents' comments on the summaries. Some of them, however, emphasised these points: the importance of personal, social and emotional development, lack of recognition of the importance of ECE and the demanding nature of the job, the amount of paperwork, the need for revising and refining the *Foundation Stage Profile* (FSP), and the necessity of improving the situation of nursery nurses. Furthermore, I maintained an attitude of scepticism throughout the analytic process as I regarded the categories that had emerged as provisional and I validated them against the data in the subsequent interviews. I also conducted further interviews after the saturation of categories in order to replicate the previous cases and test the theoretical scheme that had emerged.

Moreover, my use of the GT systematic procedures contributed to ensuring that my research procedures were reliable and the findings were valid. In addition to that, Kelle and Laurie (1995: 27) suggest that the use of software packages ‘can enhance the validity of research findings’ and ‘increases the trustworthiness of qualitative findings considerably’ because of the facilities they offer for managing and retrieving data. Similarly, Seale (2005: 191) discusses that the use of packages such as NUD\*IST has the advantage of improving the rigour of qualitative studies as they enable the researcher to see ‘the number of times things occur’ and to examine ‘the whole corpus of data’.

### **3.8.2. Generalisability**

Drawing generalisable rules and laws is an aim of quantitative researchers who use statistical sampling techniques to generalise their findings from the sample to the population. Thus, generalisability is considered one of the canons by which quantitative research studies are judged. In qualitative studies researchers do not usually aim to make generalisations. They try to achieve a deeper understanding of phenomena. They describe and explain the phenomena being studied (e.g. Hammersley, 1992; Janesick, 1994; Denzin and Lincoln, 1994; Hatch, 1995; Alasuutari, 1995; Strauss and Corbin, 1998; Gobo, 2004; Silverman, 2005). However, some researchers (e.g. Yin, 1984 cited in Gobo, 2004; Lincoln and Guba, 1985 cited in Cohen et al., 2000; Alasuutari, 1995; Williams, 2002) argue that qualitative studies have generalisability but it is different from that of quantitative studies as it is not based on statistical logic but on theoretical and analytical power. Lincoln and Guba refer to this kind of generalisability as ‘transferability’; Yin refers to it as ‘analytical generalisation’; Alasuutari calls it ‘extrapolation’ and Williams calls it ‘moderate generalisation’. Lincoln and Guba (1985) (cited in Cohen et al., 2000)

suggest that qualitative researchers should provide rich descriptions so that readers and users of the research can determine the extent to which research findings might be transferable into different settings and cultures.

In my study I did not aim to make any generalisations. My purpose has been to understand, describe and explain good practice in the FS and what influences it from practitioners' point of view. I make no claim that the theoretical framework I have arrived at is definitive. It is but an endeavour to enhance theoretical understanding of early years practice and inform training programmes and policy makers. Qualitative researchers, as Strauss and Corbin (1998: 267) put it, 'are talking more the language of explanatory power rather than that of generalizability'. I do not claim that I can generalise from a relatively small number of cases, particularly in the quantitative sense of the word. Nevertheless, I can confidently say that I have learnt a lot from these cases and gained insight and a deep understanding of early years practice and the factors affecting it. This is, hopefully, demonstrated in the following chapters that present and discuss the findings.

### **3.9. Quantification of Qualitative Data**

Qualitative-quantitative divide and integration have been, and are still subject to a long-lasting debate. Some researchers (e.g. Sale et al., 2002) argue against the combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches for triangulation or cross-validation purposes because of the ontological and epistemological differences between them. Sale et al. (2002: 50) think that 'Because quantitative and qualitative methods represent two different paradigms, they are incommensurate', and can only be combined for



complementary purposes when 'Each method studies different phenomena'. Other researchers (e.g. Bryman, 1988, 2004; Brannen, 1992, 2004; Hammersley, 1992; Silverman, 2005), however, question this dichotomy suggesting that it is possible and sometimes useful to combine qualitative and quantitative methods when this serves the research purpose. Yet, they point out that researchers should think carefully before doing such combination and should not adopt it naively. Silverman (2005) suggests that using simple tabulations such as counting can be useful in some qualitative studies and could validate the findings, but he warns that this should not be done simply for the sake of quantification. It should be done only where it is appropriate and where there is a theoretical reason behind the counted categories.

In fact, when doing any study I am alive to all possibilities that may serve my purpose. I have no reservation in using quantification in qualitative studies when this is appropriate and really serves the study purpose. In this study I thought of the possibility of making simple tabulations by quantifying the categories and finding their frequency in the data. My use of NUD\*IST facilitated this kind of quantification as it automatically presents the count of the text units coded at each concept or category. This facility assisted me in sampling and developing categories. However, I found that the dangers of doing such quantification are more than its advantages. I think it is neither accurate nor appropriate to quantify data in this study for several reasons. Firstly, I did not start the interviews with a specific set of questions that were asked to all participants. As I noted previously in this chapter, I started with a relatively wide question and followed up participants' responses. In the initial interviews in particular the follow-up questions and prompts came mainly from each participant's response to the main question. Secondly, theoretical

sampling is concerned with developing themes or categories. It implies that when a certain category is saturated, it should be put aside and the poorly developed categories are to be pursued. Thus, using theoretical sampling in this study, when a category seemed to be saturated I put the questions and prompts related to it in the end of my interview guide, and prioritised the poorly developed categories. Sometimes, due to the length of the interviews and the amount of details given by participants, I was not able to ask all the questions in the guide. Thirdly, the participants had different conversational styles. Some of them repeated themselves and talked in detail about their work and concerns, and sometimes I really found it inappropriate to interrupt them especially when I felt that they were highly interested and emotionally involved in what they were saying. On the other hand, some participants were concise. They said a point briefly and stopped talking to let me ask them another question. Therefore, the frequencies of categories did not accurately reflect their importance from the participants' perspectives.

In this respect, Hammersley (1992: 42) criticises the argument that 'precision requires quantification'. He explains:

... we must ask what precision is, and whether the most precise formulations are always the best; or indeed, whether they are always necessary. And I think it is clear that precision does not necessarily mean numbers. For example, where we are concerned with the presence or absence of a particular type of phenomenon in a situation, this can be described quite precisely without the use of numbers. It is also important to remember that precision is not the only virtue in description and measurement. Accuracy is usually even more important. And it is widely recognized that we should not express our findings in terms that imply a greater degree of precision than their likely accuracy warrants. ... It follows from that sometimes it may not be legitimate to use terms that are more precise than 'sometimes', 'often', 'generally' etc. (Hammersley, 1992: 42).



Sale et al. (2002) criticise qualitative researchers who use quantitative criteria to validate their studies. Concerning the use of computer programs in particular, they criticise using packages such as NUD\*IST and Ethnograph, which are designed for qualitative analysis, to make quantifications. Sale et al. (2002: 49) argue that 'These practices seriously violate the assumptions of the qualitative paradigm(s)'. They agree with Strauss and Corbin (1990, 1998) that qualitative researchers should apply 'distinct canons of rigor appropriate to qualitative studies' (Sale et al., 2002: 49).

I would also point out that in the interviews the participants usually emphasised the points important to them verbally by saying explicitly 'important', 'essential', 'crucial', 'very', 'extremely' and other verbal expressions, or/and by their voice pitch and tone. When I transcribed the interviews, I considered that as I capitalised the words they stressed and noted when they were talking in an emotional way. In my opinion, when dealing with human beings, words and emotions should be regarded as credible (or incredible) as numbers. Sometimes they can be even more credible than numbers.

### **3.10. Summary**

This chapter has discussed the methodological approach and the means and procedures by which the data were collected and analysed. The philosophical underpinnings, main features, merits and limitations of GT approach and in-depth interviewing were provided, and some ethical issues associated with the in-depth interview were presented. Details of the joint theoretical sampling, data collection and analysis were also given. Moreover, the problematic issues of validity, reliability, and generalisability associated with qualitative



research were considered. Finally, a justification of the abandonment of making any quantification of the data in this study was provided.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **RESEARCH FINDINGS: FEATURES OF GOOD PRACTICE**

#### **4.1. Introduction**

The purpose of this piece of research has been to explore practitioners' perspectives on good practice in the Foundation Stage (FS). I have advocated an inductive approach using in-depth interviewing and grounded theory (GT). In the previous three chapters of this thesis I have firstly thrown some light on the background, importance, purpose and approach of the study under consideration. I have secondly reviewed the relevant research evidence. Then I have explained the methodological approach adopted, the procedures of data collection and analysis, and some methodological issues associated with qualitative research. In this chapter, I will firstly give an idea about how to present and discuss findings in qualitative research in general and in GT studies in particular and how I will bring forth my research findings in this thesis. I will then present and discuss the findings related to the first major theme, *Features of Good Practice*, and interrogate them from the perspective of relevant research evidence. The second and the third themes will be dealt with in the chapter that follows.

#### **4.2. Presenting Research Findings in Qualitative Studies**

How to present and discuss the findings of qualitative research is an issue that has been addressed by many researchers (e.g. Strauss and Corbin, 1990, 1998; Alasuutari, 1995; Hatch, 1995; Clandinin and Connelly, 2000; Silverman, 2005). There seems a consensus among those researchers that qualitative research texts are most often narratives that reveal the participants' perspectives through interpreting data and giving extracts that illustrate those perspectives. According to Alasuutari (1995: 177), social research is a

literary process that ends up with a literary work. He thinks that the end product of this process is the research text and, thus, writing is ‘the most important part of research’:

Social research is, in fact, a form of literature. Of course researchers gather empirical material and analyze it, but so do fiction writers. The end-product of an investigation is in any case a literary work, and social research is to a great extent a literary process ... In that sense writing is the most important part of research: when all is said and done, the world is left with nothing else but the text. Therefore it is worth paying careful attention to writing.

Alasuutari (1995: 187) suggests that qualitative researchers who often use extracts from transcribed spoken language should use a style and a rhythm in which readers will not feel a striking contrast between the researcher’s ‘dry language of science’ and the ‘lively and interesting’ extracts. Silverman (2005: 314-315) discusses three models of writing theses: the hypothesis story, the analytic story and the mystery story. Although he seems to prefer the analytic story model proposed by Strauss and Corbin (1990, 1998), Silverman (2005: 315) points out that ‘whichever form you [the researcher] choose can be safely left to personal choice. More important is whether you are telling *some* coherent story [*italics in the original*]’. Strauss and Corbin (1998) discuss how the findings of GT studies can be brought forth. They suggest that based on the research purpose, findings can be presented as a listing of themes or a set of interrelated concepts. They can be presented as explicit propositions or hypotheses, or can be woven into a narrative as they themselves do in their own studies. They suggest that there is no single correct way of presenting findings as it depends on the researcher’s style, discipline and theoretical perspective. In the end, using Strauss and Corbin’s (1998: 254) words, ‘every writer must rely on his or her inner sense of rightness and completion’.



In this thesis I present the findings of my study firstly in integrative diagrams or networks showing the categories and subcategories that have emerged. As I noted earlier in Chapter 3, integrative diagrams, according to Strauss and Corbin (1998), can demonstrate a graphic representation of the whole theoretical framework that has been arrived at or different parts of it. A diagram, as they explain, can illustrate all themes and their subcategories or one theme and its subcategories. After illustrating the themes in diagrams or networks, I weave them in a narrative explaining the participants' perspectives and giving examples of their own words. In my view, this is the most appropriate style to bring forth my study results for the following reasons. Firstly, by presenting the categories and subcategories in diagrams, I give my reader a clear graphic representation of the findings and an outline of the story that follows. Secondly, the narrative style, hopefully, enables me to report a holistic integrated account of the participants' views and let my reader hear their voices. Moreover, I feel that the narrative style could be closer to readers, more expressive, and more interesting, or at least less boring, than the non-narrative one. I think, as Clandinin and Connelly (2000: 149) discuss, that neither the 'cold, depersonalized, unsigned, voiceless' style, nor the 'fraternal intimacy, causing the reader to feel mildly embarrassed to intrude' is a good research text. I think a voiced middle-ground position between these two extremes is perhaps more appropriate.

The data analysis in this study revealed three major themes with their categories and subcategories. In this chapter I present and discuss the first theme, *Features of Good Practice*. Then, in the chapter that follows I discuss the other two major themes, that are, *Enhancing/Supportive Factors* and *Difficulties* as they are both factors that impact on

good practice. In both chapters I use the same style: presenting themes in diagrams then weaving them in a descriptive analytic narrative.

### 4.3. Features of Good Practice

Figure 7 shows the *Features of Good Practice* that have emerged from the data. As can be seen in Figure 7, there are six features: *Foundation Stage curriculum, classroom*

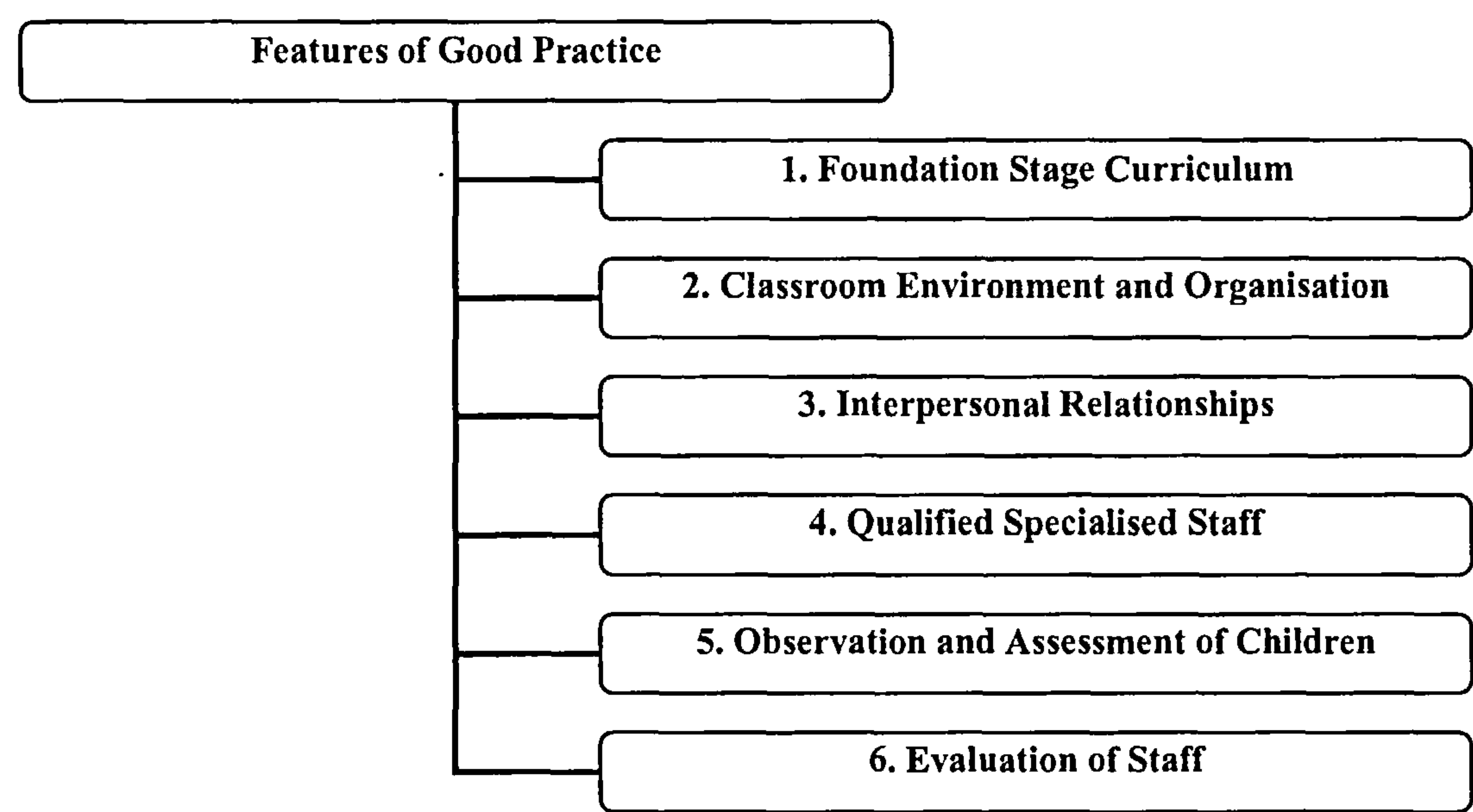


Figure 7: Features of Good Practice

*environment and organisation, interpersonal relationships, qualified specialised staff, observation and assessment of children, and evaluation of staff.* I can now undertake a discussion of those themes with evidence from the data and in relation to the relevant literature.

### 4.3.1. Foundation Stage Curriculum

The *Foundation Stage curriculum* theme, as demonstrated in Figure 8, includes four themes: *supporting children's development in all curriculum areas, integrated curriculum, play-based curriculum and child-centred curriculum.*

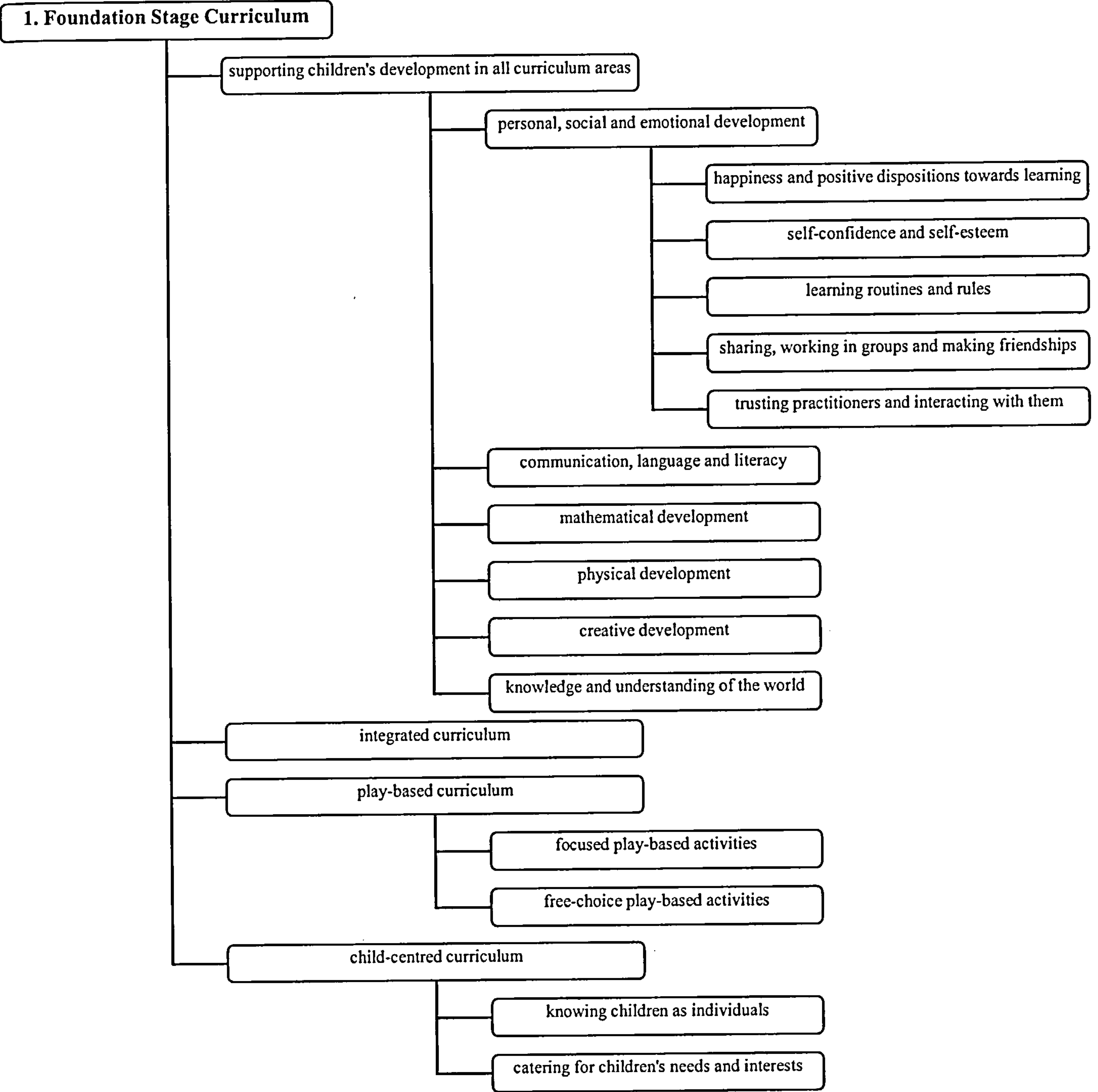
#### 4.3.1.1. Supporting Children's Development in All Curriculum Areas

All of the practitioners agreed that having the six areas of learning set out in the FS curriculum was helpful to them in planning. They perceived all the six areas as important for children's development. Yet, they all stressed the importance of *personal, social and emotional development*. They described it as their 'main focus', 'the big umbrella' and as being of 'paramount' importance. Most practitioners, particularly in nursery education, viewed this area of development as their first and main role. They considered children's *happiness* an ultimate goal, and thus they always tried to ensure that their children were happy in the setting in order to develop in them *positive dispositions towards learning* and school:

*The most important thing for me is their happiness, their happiness. As long as those children are happy, I'm ok (Maria).*

Throughout the year the practitioners tried to develop children's *self-confidence and self-esteem* by being positive with them, reinforcing them however simple their achievements were and encouraging them to be independent. The practitioners said that from the beginning of the year they set *routines and rules* for the class so that the children would feel secure as they knew what would happen during the day and what they were able to do and what they were not able to do. They made them feel part of a group and encouraged





**Figure 8: Foundation Stage Curriculum**

them to *share materials and equipment, work in groups and make friendships*. All the practitioners said that they tried to interact with the children as much as possible, listen to them and have fun with them so that they would like and *trust the practitioners and interact with them* and with other people. This extract from Mary's interview illustrates some of the subcategories related to the *personal, social and, emotional development* area:

*I honestly think that personal, social and emotional development in particular is like the big umbrella. If the child isn't interested in learning, if they haven't got certain ... em self-esteem and confidence and ability to interact with other people and all of those things, they are going to really struggle to learn anything at all. So I do think that is really of far-reaching importance. It's not just a nice thing to have social skills. It's crucial (Mary).*

To have social skills and be able to communicate, children's language development was seen as very important. Most practitioners perceived *communication, language and literacy* as of prime importance. They said that they provided the children with a print-rich environment, and all the activities they planned were opportunities for developing language, literacy and communication skills. Everyday, for example, they would read a big book with the children to develop their language as well as positive dispositions towards books and reading. The emphasis on this area of development appeared clearly within Kay's talk about the role play area:

*It [the role play area] encourages language development which is the MOST important because if you can't speak properly, you can't start a conversation and you can't really learn to read or anything if you can't speak first, you know. So anything that encourages them to speak is a good idea (Kay).*

In reception classes particularly, the participants said that everyday there was a focused literacy activity which they did in small groups to teach letter sounds and enrich the

children's vocabulary. Some of them said that they had to do some formal teaching of literacy in reception to prepare the children for year 1, but they did that for short periods and when their children were ready for such formal teaching. Shirley, for instance, who was working in a school where the FS is a mix of reception and nursery said:

*The reception children are withdrawn for part of the morning to do focused activities for literacy and numeracy, and because they have to start learning letter sounds and how reading is formed and how writing is formed (Shirley).*

In fact, the emphasis on personal, social and emotional development and communication, language and literacy was prominent in all interviews. As for the other curriculum areas, they were seen as equally important by most practitioners. Nevertheless, Alison, Kay, Jane, Janet and Jill stressed *mathematical development*. Beatrice, Mary, Tina and Valerie emphasised *physical development*. Deborah and Yvette focused on *creative development*, particularly the role of art in children's development. In this respect, the practitioners' perspectives agree with what Taylor et al. (1972) and Turner (1977) (both cited in Aubrey et al., 2000) found, in that their participants prioritised socio-emotional development. My interviewees, however, disagree with those of Taylor et al. and Turner with regard to physical development and creative development as Taylor et al. found that physical development came at the end of the nursery teachers' priorities, and Turner found that aesthetic development was last in terms of play group leaders' priorities.

The practitioners' views in this regard are compatible with the Rumbold Report (DES, 1990) which stressed the role of adults in developing the child's self-image and self-confidence. They are also compatible with Ball's (1994: 54) features of good practice as he writes, 'early years curriculum is centrally concerned with motivation, confidence and



socialisation – without which learning is hardly possible at all’. They also agree with the *Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage* (CGFS) (QCA/DfEE, 2000: 28) which emphasises the importance of supporting children’s development in all the six areas, but points out that

Successful personal, social and emotional development is critical for very young children in all aspects of their lives and gives them the best opportunity for success in all other areas of learning.

Moreover, these perspectives are also consistent with Blenkin and Kelly’s (1997) study in which head teachers considered children’s personal development and happiness as the most important in the early years curriculum. They are also consistent with McMullen et al.’s (2005) cross-cultural study in which they found that the emphasis on promoting social and emotional development was one of the similarities in practitioners’ beliefs in the five countries involved. Children’s social and emotional well being was also stressed by Bagdi and Vacca (2005) in their study of the shared emotional experiences between children and caregivers. Furthermore, the practitioners’ emphasis on communication, language and literacy is in line with Vygotsky and Bruner’s views of the central role of language and communication in children’s development (see Wood, 1998; Cameron, 2001).

I think that children’s personal, social and emotional development is of paramount importance because it helps them develop inner peace and security, self-discipline and internal motivation, contributes to the construction of their values, and enhances their overall growth and their development in all other areas. This does not mean neglecting cognitive development. On the contrary, it enhances and supports it as research evidence on brain development, according to Caine and Caine’s (1991) (cited in Bagdi and Vacca,

2005) extensive review revealed that emotions and cognition are inseparable. Goleman (1995: 226), in his book *Emotional Intelligence*, suggests that emotions are a fundamental element of all human learning and relationships describing childhood as ‘a crucial window of opportunity for shaping lifelong emotional propensities’. Furthermore, from Edwards et al.’s (1998) reflections on Reggio Emilia approach to Early Childhood Education (ECE), Moyles (2001: 84) concludes that emotions are very mindful and ‘to operate emotionally at a mindful level equates with significant deep level, higher-order thinking’.

#### 4.3.1.2. Integrated Curriculum

According to all participants, even though they liked the existence of the six curriculum areas, they did not deal with them as discrete subject areas. They tried to integrate all the areas around a certain topic. As Diane said:

*... that's how we cover the areas but we try to do it for a topic. We are looking at animals at the minute. So in literacy we are doing poems and stories about animals. In maths we are making patterns with animals; we are sorting animals; we are counting legs. In the creative room we are making a big jungle. In PE we are doing dances; we pretend to be different animals. So we try to link everything in and relate it altogether ... I think for our age children it's more effective than teaching in discrete subjects because it's linking everything in and they get enthusiastic (Diane).*

There was an agreement among the practitioners that young children learn best in an integrated way. They said that the early years curriculum is cross-curricular, so when they planned an activity, even when it was focused on a certain area, they managed to achieve some objectives set on the other areas. As Valerie explained:

*... it is so cross-curricular in every way that even if I've got a maths focus I can always manage to pull some literacy in, some knowledge and understanding of the world and some personal, social and emotional. I*

*find that even if you are doing a focused task, it is easy to get them all, to pull all the different areas (Valerie).*

This finding is consistent with Bruce's (1987, 1997) and Ball's (1994) principles of good practice in early childhood. It also agrees with the early years curriculum suggested by the Rumbold Report (DES, 1990). This finding is also recognised in the CGFS. Moreover, it echoes McMullen et al.'s (2005) findings that integration across the curriculum as one of the features of developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) was one of the similarities in practitioners' beliefs and practices in the five countries studied. According to DAP philosophy, one of the features of an effective curriculum is to achieve integration across the curriculum (Bredekamp, 1987).

#### **4.3.1.3. Play-Based Curriculum**

There was a consensus among the practitioners that good practice in the FS requires a play-based curriculum. They all think that children aged 3 and 4 years cannot be taught in a formal direct way as can older children. Therefore, they tried to achieve most of the curriculum goals through structured and unstructured play as they planned *focused play-based activities* to achieve specific objectives and they gave children time for *free-choice activities* to do whatever they were interested in, using the resources available to them. They said that in order to learn and progress, children need to experience things and undertake practical activities:

*... the underlying important thing is that children learn through PLAY .. very young children learn through play. Yes you structure the play but they have to have the opportunity to experience. They have to have the hands-on. They have to be able to experience, to feel, to smell, to touch, to get dirty. They have to have that experience (Beatrice).*



The practitioners' view of the importance of play agrees with that of many researchers (e.g. Day, 1980; Hutt et al., 1989; Edwards and Knight, 1994; Hall, 1994; Moyles, 1994; David, 1996; Guha, 1996; Bennett et al., 1997; Curtis, 1998; Riley, 1998; Baily, 1999; Grainger and Gooch, 1999; Hawkins, 1999; Lobman, 2003; Saracho, 2004). It also echoes the official view that play is 'a key way in which young children learn' (QCA/DfEE, 2000: 25). Moreover, some of the studies that explored practitioners' views within the FS context (Keating et al., 2002; Aubrey, 2004; Miller and Smith, 2004) found that one of the reasons why practitioners had a positive response to the introduction of the FS and the CGFS was their acknowledgement of the importance of play. This perspective, however, partially agrees with the EPPE findings (Sylva et al., 2003) which indicated that while child-initiated play provided the best opportunities for practitioners to extend children's thinking and learning, 'the most highly qualified' practitioners, who were the most effective in interacting with children, provided 'the most direct teaching' (p.5). It also partially agrees with Moyles et al. (2002a) and Adams et al. (2004). In the SPEEL project, Moyles et al. (2002a) found that play was a high priority in practitioners' thinking but not in their observed practice. Adams et al. (2004) found that while reception practitioners valued play, they perceived that it was less valued by policy makers, and in practice they planned extremely structured activities and did formal teaching especially of literacy and numeracy in order to achieve the specified goals.

#### **4.3.1.4. Child-Centred Curriculum**

The participants' talk about their practice indicated that they advocated a child-centred approach in which children were 'the trigger'. Alison, Jackie, Jane, Joanna, Mary, Sarah

and Tina said explicitly that their approach was ‘child-centred’ and most of the activities they planned were based on children’s interests and needs:

*... we base our planning around the observations that we have done. Our approach is a child-centred teaching approach, so we work from the child at the beginning and we plan around what they want to do (Jackie).*

Most participants said that it is important to *know children as individuals* and know about their backgrounds as this enables them to treat the children appropriately and *cater for their needs and interests*. This perspective supports the principles of High/Scope (Hohmann and Weikart, 1995), Reggio Emilia (Malaguzzi, 1998; Edwards et al., 1998) and DAP (Bredekamp, 1987; Bredekamp et al., 1992) approaches to ECE, the suggestions and recommendations of the Rumbold Report (DES, 1990), the principles and features of good practice worked out by Bruce (1987, 1997) and Ball (1994), and those set out in the CGFS (QCA/DfEE, 2000). According to Curtis (1998), one of the main features of successful pre-school programmes in many countries was their emphasis on the needs of individual children. In the SPEEL project (Moyle et al., 2002a), the individuality of each child was considered fundamental. Furthermore, one of the advantages of the FS expressed by the head teachers and the reception teachers in Aubrey’s (2004) study was its focus on child-centred and child-led activities. Because children are naturally of different abilities, most practitioners said that they differentiated the activities, and that a lot of differentiation went in the help and support they gave to children. This echoes the findings of the SPEEL (Moyle et al., 2002a) that differentiation occurred through the activities rather than at the planning stage. This kind of support is an application of Vygotsky’s ‘zone of proximal development’ and Bruner’s idea of ‘scaffolding’ (Wood, 1998; Cameron, 2001).

4.3.2. Classroom Environment and Organisation

The practitioners think that one of the main features of good practice is providing children with an appropriate early years environment, both indoor and outdoor. Figure 9 shows the characteristics of such environment as they perceived it. They said that the

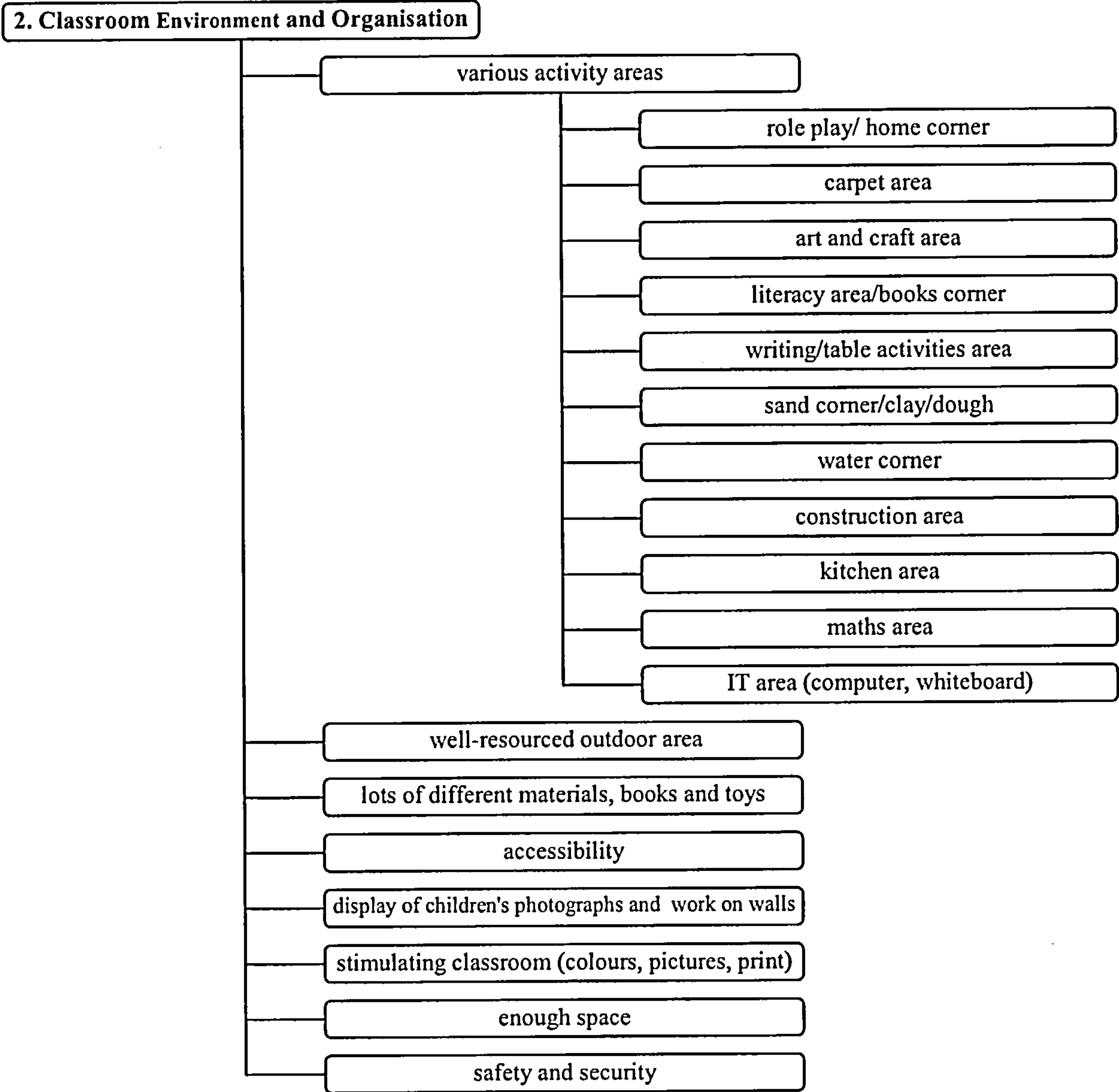


Figure 9: Classroom Environment and Organisation



early years classroom should be organised in *various activity areas* resourced with relevant materials and equipment. In fact, the classrooms of all the participants included the areas shown in Figure 9. In most classrooms the areas were labelled as can be seen in Figure 9, but in some they were named slightly differently. For example, in some classrooms, sand, water, clay, and art and craft areas were organised in one part of the room called the messy area, wet area or creative room. Most practitioners viewed all those areas as equally important as they all provide opportunities for learning and development:

*I think they [the areas] are all different parts of the learning environment. And I think they're all as important as each other. I don't think you can say one aspect of the classroom is more important than anything else. I think you have to have a balance because especially you know four-year olds don't have .. em you know they're not going to follow a set plan. They need to be able to express themselves in a variety of ways. I think everything is essential (Jane).*

Few, however, stressed the importance of the role play area, explaining that imaginative play contributes more to developing children's language and social skills which are highly important. Concerning the Information Technology (IT) area, although all practitioners said that it is good to have an IT area, the most experienced of them questioned its value, suggesting that it is not a priority in the FS classroom and it should not be overused. This echoes the findings of Hall and Higgins (2002) who discussed early years teachers' beliefs and practice in using computers. Drawing on a major research project funded by the government's Teacher Training Agency (TTA) which investigated the use of computers for mathematics and language teaching, they revealed that experienced early years teachers were sceptical about the value of computers in children's learning. Hall and Higgins illustrate how computers can be used to undertake developmentally appropriate activities in mathematics for children in the early years,

indicating that computers themselves are not detrimental to learning and that practitioners' beliefs influence the way they are used. They, therefore, conclude that for the effective integration of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) in early years practice, micro level issues related to practitioners' beliefs and practices should be taken into consideration.

All practitioners emphasised the importance of having a *well resourced outdoor area* for children's physical development. Some of them said that their children had at least half an hour of outdoor activities every day and in summer they used it more, especially for nursery children, while some admitted that they did not use the outdoor area as they would like to do because it was inappropriate in terms of health for the children in winter and it lacked equipment. All practitioners said that the indoor and outdoor areas should be resourced with a wide range of *materials, books and toys* which should be visible and *accessible* to children so that they can get and use what they want independently, especially in free-choice time. As they said and as I saw in their classrooms, everything was accessible to the children. Chairs and tables were all small sized. Cupboards and shelves were at children's level. Materials were labelled and organised in the different areas. Moreover, lots of *photographs of the children* doing various activities, and examples of *children's work* with their names printed clearly under it, were displayed on the walls in order to raise their self-esteem. As Sarah said:

*I always like when children's work is on the wall because it's celebrating their work and showing their achievement. I always do that (Sarah).*

The overall environment was *stimulating* as it contained a lot of print and colourful displays: letters, numbers, congratulation cards and visual aids. Most practitioners talked

about the importance of *space* in the early years environment. They think that the bigger the outdoor and indoor spaces, the better for organising different activity areas, developing children's motor skills and for children's safety. Having a *safe secure environment* was described by the practitioners as essential. They said that it is their role to ensure that the place, the furniture and the equipment are safe for the children, and to be with the children and monitor them even during the free-choice activities to ensure that they do not hurt themselves, or one another, with the materials and the equipment they are using:

*It [the environment] needs to be safe. The physical things are safe. You know you don't want bits of carpets that can be dangerous to them. You don't need things to be lying on floor, and it's ideal that things can be at their level so they can access things. Em .. outside you've got to have safe surface for the children (Tina).*

The practitioners' perspectives on the FS environment and its characteristics are generally consistent with the consensus of early years educators and researchers on the importance of a safe, secure, well-resourced and stimulating learning environment with enough space and various activity areas so that it provides children with different experiences and opportunities for learning and development (e.g. Beaty, 1984; Blenkin and Whitehead, 1996; Curtis, 1998). The importance of the environment is emphasised in the three widespread approaches to ECE: DAP (Bredekamp, 1987; Bredekamp et al., 1992), High/Scope (Hohmann and Weikart, 1995), and Reggio Emilia (Malaguzzi, 1998). Moreover, one of Ball's (1994) main features of good practice is a well-planned, stimulating, secure and healthy environment.



### 4.3.3. Interpersonal Relationships

Interpersonal atmosphere was a prominent theme in all the interviews. All practitioners believe that good practice in the FS requires good interpersonal relationships as Victoria said while talking about the atmosphere of early years settings:

*I think communication is a big issue and social skills. You need to talk to people and understand others' feelings (Victoria).*

As illustrated in Figure 10, the practitioners talked about their relationships with the children and their influence on children's relationships. They also talked about their relationships with colleagues, stressing the importance of teamwork and collegiality, and their relationships with parents and the necessity of parental involvement.

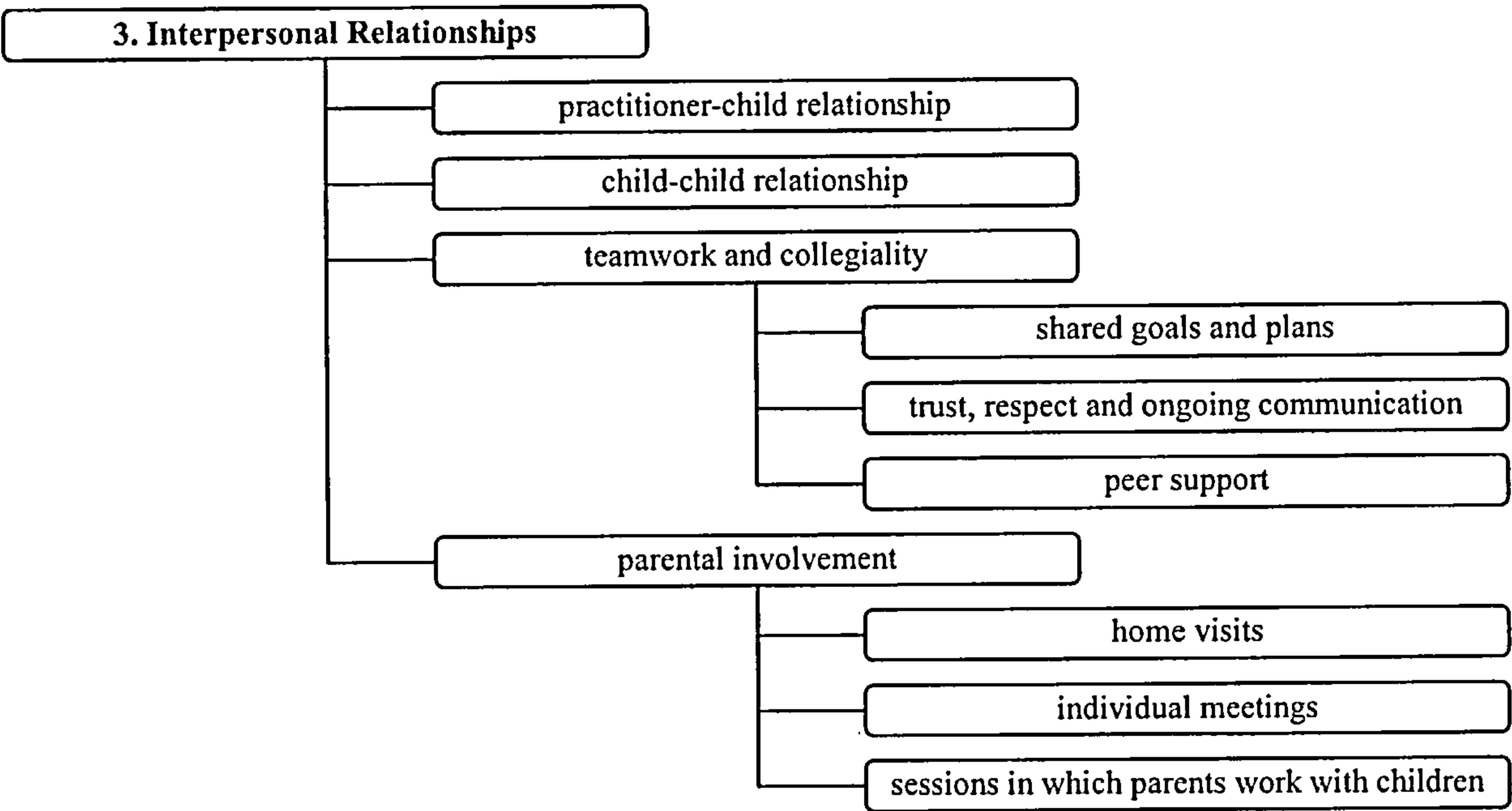


Figure 10: Interpersonal Relationships

As for *practitioner-child relationship*, all practitioners think that it is essential to have a warm friendly relationship with the children. They said they tried to establish such relationship before the beginning of the year by meeting the children and their parents in the setting, talking with the child about him/her and explaining to the parents how they would work with the children. Some nursery practitioners would also do home visits if parents wanted in order to know more about the child and to manage a comfortable transition between home and nursery. Most reception practitioners said that they worked very closely with the nursery in their schools so that when the children moved to reception classes they were already familiar with them. According to most practitioners, children would relax, like the practitioner, interact with her/him and trust her/him when she/he had fun with them, talked at their level and praised their work:

*Children have got to feel that you care for them and you know them as individuals. We try very hard that they have a nice time and we laugh together. This is how children relax. If they can have fun with you and can laugh with you, I think they begin to trust you and like you and they will start to learn (Mary).*

Concerning *child-child relationship*, most practitioners explained that encouraging positive behaviours, having reward system and having routines, rules and parameters were successful and effective with the majority of children as they responded to routines and rules. They also said that having fun activities in groups and as a whole class made children like one another and enjoy being together.

Mention of *teamwork and collegiality* as features of good practice occurred strongly and repeatedly in all interviews. All practitioners perceived early years work as a teamwork. They emphasised that it is important that FS staff *plan together and work as a team towards the same goals*. They also think that *trust, respect and ongoing communication*

are very important among the staff. The teachers said that although they had the responsibility and the authority to decide everything in the class, they did not take any decision individually. They always discussed things with the nursery nurses, listened to their ideas and respected them:

*We have a good working community within the staff. We are all working together, having some sort of shared vision. I think teamwork is important because I can't do it by myself, so I think teamwork will be the critical in terms of organising. Organisation, teamwork and RESPECTING the others' ideas because they come with fantastic ideas. It's not just me (Alison).*

Furthermore, most of them said that *peer support* was significant, especially when one of the staff was unsure about how to handle a difficult situation with the children or their parents:

*... you could have one particular child who might sort of go in the wrong way and you know that there's another member of staff there who would help. That's the good thing about working in a team because there are three of us who are all different, thank God, and we help each other out in that way. And we have someone to speak to at the end of the day because sometimes we do have families that need extra care, extra help and it's VERY very emotional time, and you need someone where you can't tell your husband or partner about it, but the friends you work with you can talk to, so you get their support as well (Yvette).*

*Parental involvement* was described as an essential element of good practice in early years by all practitioners. They said that they always tried to build good relationships with parents before the beginning of the year and throughout the year. Some of them did *home visits* which served a dual purpose of knowing about the child and establishing good relationships with the child and the parents. They said that having *meetings with parents*, even for a brief time when they brought their children in in the morning or when they collected them, was important to know if there was anything happening at home that



affected the child's behaviour at school and vice versa, and to keep parents informed about their child's progress and any relevant concerns:

*If they [parents] are happy to come into school, it is much better for the child that we can work together and parents can really reinforce at home what you are doing in school and vice versa, and parents who're having problems at home with the child .. if they can come and talk to you, you can try and reinforce what they are doing at home. It keeps stability for the child. So we try to encourage parents in as much as we possibly can (Shirley).*

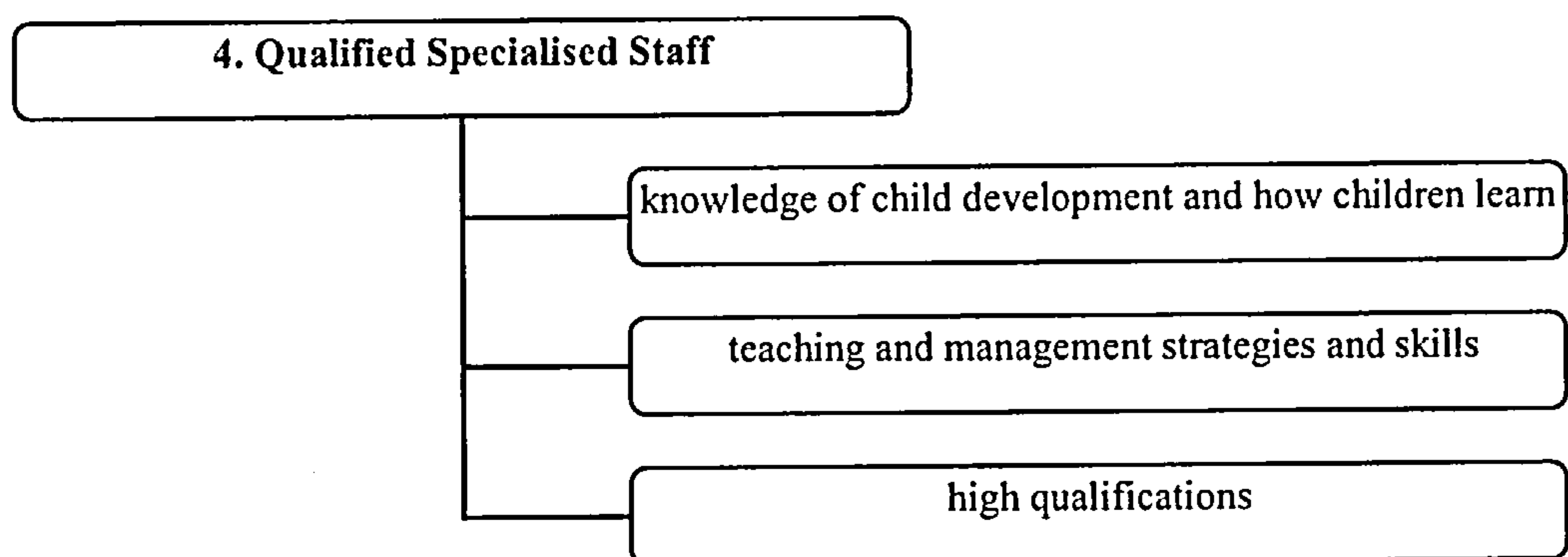
Some practitioners said that they planned special sessions and invited parents to come and work with their children while doing some enjoyable activities. Bridget, Jackie, Joanna, Mary and Tina, who arranged such sessions in their schools, expressed their happiness about them as they were well attended by parents. With regard to parental involvement in general, the participants said that parents varied. Some of them were very cooperative and this will be discussed in the *Enhancing/Supportive Factors* section under the *parents' cooperation* theme. Some parents were too busy to cooperate due to their work commitments and the practitioners tried to catch them when they brought their children or when they collected them to talk about anything significant related to their children. Some parents were difficult and affected their children in a negative way. This will be discussed in the *Difficulties* section within the *social deprivation and poverty* theme.

The practitioners' views of the importance of interpersonal relationships are in agreement with the literature that has addressed this issue (e.g. Beaty, 1984; Bredekamp, 1987; Bruce, 1987, 1997; DES, 1990; Ball, 1994; Nutbrown, 1994; Hohmann and Weikart, 1995; Blenkin and Whitehead, 1996; Hevey and Curtis, 1996; Curtis, 1998; Malaguzzi, 1998). This literature discusses the importance of good relationships among all parties

involved in order to provide the children with a warm, safe and healthy environment. With regard to the child's relationships with adults and other children, it suggests that they are of central importance and have significant impact on his/her development, and, therefore, practitioners should spend adequate time interacting with children individually and in groups. It also suggests that practitioners should have the skills that enable them to work in a team, communicate well with other colleagues and support one another for the benefit of children. From their observations of a number of reception classes, Adams et al. (2004: 22) found that the quality of relationships in those classes was 'impressively high' as the observed interactions between the practitioners and the children indicated 'warm, caring, secure relationships in supportive classroom environments'. Concerning parental involvement in particular, the practitioners' perspectives agree with that of the Rumbold Report (DES, 1990), Hurst (1991), Rennie (1996), Hall and Santer (2000), Karstadt and Medd (2000), Moyles et al. (2002a), Sylva et al. (2003), Adams et al. (2004), Hall et al. (2005) and Swick (2006) who explain that collaborative relationships between the home and the setting enhance children's progress and emotional well-being. This is also consistent with the official viewpoint that considers working with parents as one of the principles of ECE (QCA/DfEE, 2000).

#### **4.3.4. Qualified Specialised Staff**

Most practitioners think that good practice in early years requires qualified staff who are specialised in teaching young children. As Figure 11 shows, practitioners think that FS staff should have sound background *knowledge of child development and how children learn* as this is essential to be able to work properly with children. They should also have different *teaching and management strategies and skills* to cater for children's individual



**Figure 11: Qualified Specialised Staff**

differences and learning styles and be able to deal with them and handle their various moods and behaviours. Some teachers, particularly Jackie, Janet, Joanna and Mary, think that staff working in the FS should have *high qualifications*; they should have trained to degree level as this stage is as important as, or even more important than, primary and secondary stages. Jackie, who had visited Reggio Emilia early childhood centres in Italy, talked about that experience, pointing out that some practitioners working there had masters and doctoral degrees. Joanna who is currently doing a masters degree in early childhood studies said:

*I think it's important to have that level of training really, not that anybody can come and work with children because there is more to it, and it would be shame if it became watered down because the children are young (Joanna).*

This feature echoes the findings of many studies (e.g. Cassidy et al., 1995; Smith, 1997; Vartuli, 1999; Abbott-Shim et al., 2000; File and Gullo, 2002; McMullen and Alat, 2002) which showed the positive influence of ECE programmes on practitioners' beliefs and practices. It also agrees with Blenkin and Kelly (1997) who found that one of the determinant factors of quality ECE curriculum was having well trained specialised staff who have knowledge of child development. Moyles et al. (2002a) found that knowledge



of child development was fundamental for effective teaching and learning, and the practitioners' ability of self-reflection was related to their level of training. Similarly, Sylva et al. (2003) revealed that staff's knowledge of child development was one of the features that explain the effective practice in the most effective early years settings, and that the higher the level of qualification and training staff had, the more effective their practice was. They also found that the skills and the behaviour policies that practitioners' used contributed to better practice and outcomes. From their questionnaire data, Adams et al. (2004: 20) found that most of LEA advisers considered 'understanding pedagogy' and 'child development' as 'vital topics for training', but only less than a fifth of other participants, including teachers, gave these topics high rates. Moreover, Athey (1990), Nutbrown (1994) and Hevey and Curtis (1996) emphasised the importance of having qualified staff who have knowledge of child development and how children learn. Hevey and Curtis (1996) also suggested that staff need different skills and strategies to be effective. The CGFS also indicates that good practice requires practitioners who have knowledge of child development and good skills that enable them to plan and implement the FS curriculum.

#### **4.3.5. Observation and Assessment of Children**

Observation and assessment were regarded an integral part of the FS curriculum by all the practitioners. As for observation, they viewed it as essential for two purposes. Firstly, it informed their planning as from observing children they knew their interests, strengths and weaknesses, and they also evaluated what they had offered them. Based on the information they got from the observations, they adjusted or changed their plans.

Secondly, observation provided the main input for assessing children and evaluating their progress:

*We OBSERVE the children .. the way we learn about the children is through observation, so during our activities with them we write down notes about what the children are doing and we ASSESS them through those observations, but we also analyse the observations to see where the children’s interests are and how the children are progressing and we base our planning around the observations that we have done (Jackie).*

As Figure 12 shows, the practitioners said that they recorded their observations of children by writing *notes* of any significant incident of each child’s progress or they

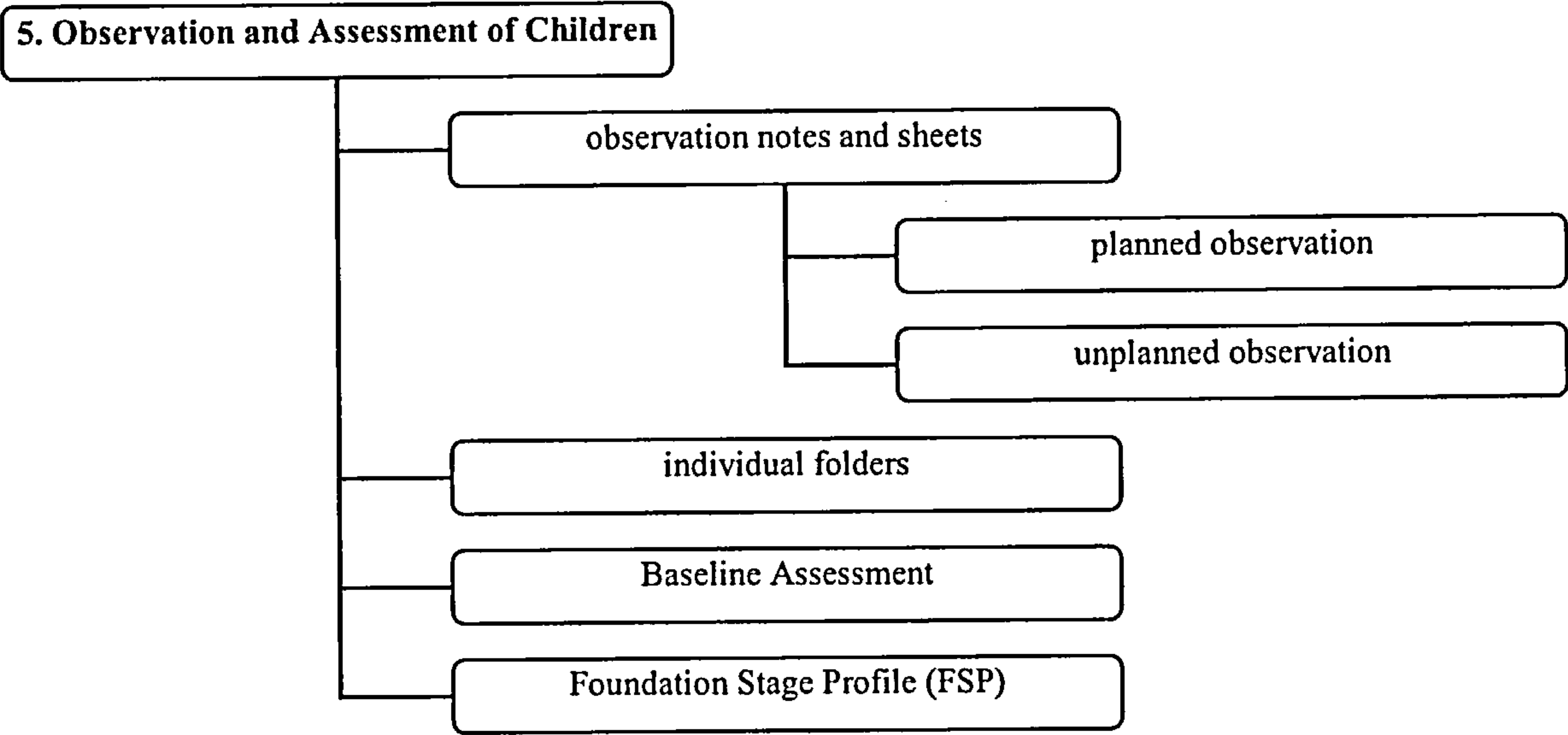


Figure 12: Observation and Assessment of Children

ticked and filled in *sheets* containing certain points relevant to the early learning goals and the child’s progress towards them. Most practitioners said that while working with the children they usually jotted down brief notes of anything important they noticed. They later recorded those notes on the child’s folder or/and filled in sheets based on them. Some of the observations, as the practitioners explained, were *planned*

*observations* as they planned a certain activity for a child or a group of children and watched their achievement of certain objectives while doing that activity. Some were *unplanned observations* in which they observed the children in whatever they were doing and noted down any significant things about a child:

*We sometimes plan the observations, but sometimes I just go around the children and see what they are doing, and those are just observations that happen; they are not planned. They are just things that you see because it's AMAZING what the children can actually do in the classroom that you haven't planned (Diane).*

As for assessment, all practitioners perceived that it is essential to assess children's progress. Yet, most of them, particularly the teachers and the nursery nurses working without teachers, complained about the amount of assessment they were required to do and record, describing it as unnecessary. All practitioners made *individual folders* for the children in which they recorded observations and kept examples of their work and photographs. Those folders were accessible to the parents and, in some schools, to the children. Practitioners who were required to do the *Baseline Assessment* (SCAA, 1997) and the *Foundation Stage Profile* (FSP) (QCA/DfES, 2003) were divided in their perspectives on them. Since many of their views about them were negative, I was not sure while analysing the data whether to put them under the *observation and assessment* theme which is included within the first major theme, *Features of Good Practice*, or under the third theme, *Difficulties*. Finally, however, since the Baseline Assessment which was implemented in schools from September 1998 and the FSP were two main tools for assessing children in the FS, and since some teachers mentioned a number of advantages of doing them, I decided to include them under the *observation and assessment* theme. With regard to the FSP in particular, I also included it within the



*Difficulties* under the *negative government intervention* theme because all the teachers criticised it and complained about it.

The Baseline Assessment, which is done at the beginning and the end of the reception year, was perceived by a few teachers as good because it informed them about the children's level when they joined the reception and showed the value added at the end of the reception year. Most teachers, however, said that it was of a very limited value as while it informed them about children's level in language and mathematics, it did not tell anything about the personal, social and emotional side which they considered the most important in the FS. In the light of the numerous assessments they did for the folders and the FSP, they questioned the value of doing it and described it as unnecessary:

*We are assessing SO MUCH. And I don't want to get carried away ... I try to do things with the children, and I need to teach ... I think it's TOO MUCH ... I sometimes feel I am OVERWHELMED by the amount of assessment ... I find the Baseline not very useful for me because it doesn't really inform me at all how the children feel. It tells me whether they can recognise numbers, things like that. But I think the terrible with anything that you've got in the computer it's got to be easy and measurable and those are the easy things to assess. The difficult things to assess are the personal, social and emotional things. Those are the hardest things to assess and the computer can't assess (Alison).*

As for the FSP, the teachers said that it is a good indicator of what most children should achieve by the end of the reception, and that they understand its necessity for official bodies. Nevertheless, they think that it should be refined and teachers' concerns about it should be considered. The negative comments on the FSP will be presented in Chapter 5 when discussing the *Difficulties* under *negative government intervention* theme.

The practitioners' realisation of the importance of observation and assessment agree with the views of many researchers (e.g. Bruce, 1987; Drummond, 1993; Hurst, 1994; Drummond and Nutbrown, 1996; Webber, 1999) who consider them to be central and integral elements of early years educational processes. The official perspective expressed in the CGFS and the FSP also regards observation and assessment as central factors of good practice in the FS, and requires practitioners to do and record observations and formative assessments throughout the year. This process would finally be evident in the FSP at the end of the FS. The findings of the SPEEL project (Moyle et al., 2002a), however, revealed that formative diagnostic assessment that informs planning was not common in practice even though it was considered essential.

In this respect, the strange thing I noticed is that it is clearly stated in the FSP that it is the official assessment document that practitioners are required to complete and it replaces the Baseline Assessment. Yet, the reception practitioners interviewed were still required to do the Baseline Assessment in addition to the FSP, and both are time consuming. I wonder why schools still require teachers to do it if the FSP is the official requirement, is more comprehensive, and requires enormous observations and recording. Moreover, it is noteworthy in this regard that the Baseline Assessment with its ninety schemes is not without flaws, and the researchers who studied it raised some questions and concerns about it (see e.g. Easen et al., 1998).

4.3.6. Evaluation of Staff

The evaluation of staff was one of the features of good practice that came over from the interviews. As Figure 13 demonstrates, the participants talked about three types of evaluation: self-reflection and evaluation, peer evaluation and performance management.

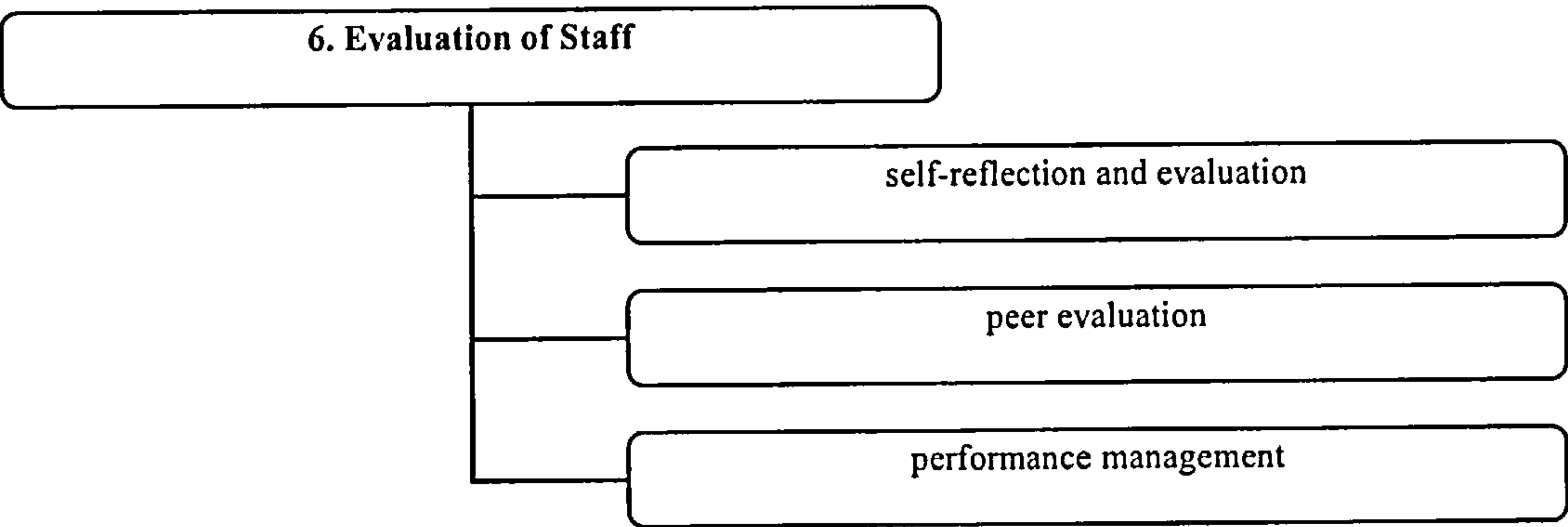


Figure 13: Evaluation of Staff

The practitioners said that they were *self-reflective* and always evaluated their work. Some of them said that they recorded this evaluation in their planning while some suggested that their self-reflection was spontaneous. For instance, if an activity did not go well, they would change it, and if it went well and was effective, they would remember that. Thus, those practitioners said that there was no need to record their self-evaluation:

*If you do something and it works and it turns up really well and it is fantastic, you will remember, and if you do something and it goes absolutely wrong, you will also remember. So I think sometimes it is almost like undermining the teacher by saying we have to write down what has been a good lesson and what has not (Valerie).*

Most practitioners said that there was ongoing communication among all staff members in the FS unit or classes, and they always gave feedback informally to one another and supported one another. Concerning the teachers particularly, in some schools there was a *peer evaluation* system in which teachers observed their colleagues' classes, evaluated



their practice and provided feedback. Furthermore, in all schools there was a formal *performance management* system in which the teachers were evaluated by the head teacher and sometimes by an adviser:

*So my work is evaluated by my head and adviser, and teachers sometimes come in to watch. We watch each other as well to see how we are doing. There is a lot of evaluation of myself (Shirley).*

As for the performance management for nursery nurses, four of them said that their work was evaluated by the head teachers; four said that it was evaluated by the teachers with whom they work, and one nursery nurse was not sure whether she was formally evaluated by anyone as no one had ever discussed this with her.

Most practitioners think that the informal self-reflection and evaluation of one's own practice as individuals and teams are more beneficial and have more positive impact on practice than the formal evaluation systems. The practitioners' realisation of the importance of self-reflection and evaluation for good practice agrees with the writings and findings of many researchers (e.g. Dewey, 1916, 1933; Habermas, 1972; Schön, 1983; Beaty, 1984; Kolb, 1984; Ball, 1994; Nutbrown, 1994; Hevey and Curtis, 1996; Pascal and Bertram, 1997; Al-Hassan, 1999; Keyes, 2000; Clarck and Stroud, 2002; Moyles et al., 2002a, 2002b). The importance of self-reflection and evaluation is also evident in the CGFS (QCA/DfEE, 2000). In this regard, some researchers, as I noted elsewhere (Al-Hassan, 1999), suggest that some teachers find external evaluation threatening and disturbing, and react automatically against any approach that dents their self-esteem, especially when the external evaluation does not coincide with what they think about themselves. This point raises an important issue associated with the qualities

and competencies that should exist in the external evaluator. Yet, discussing this issue is beyond the scope of this study.

It is noteworthy that none of the participants in this study had been involved in research with universities or other research institutions. Some of them said that they would be interested in cooperating with researchers provided that this cooperation would not add to them workload or take up much of their time. The practitioners' view in this regard echoes what Keyes (2000) found from her partnerships with early years teachers who said that they would like to do action research but they lacked the time and the help to do it. Furthermore, research evidence (e.g. Bennet et al., 1997; Al-Hassan, 1999; Keyes, 2000; Moyles, 2001; Clarck and Stroud, 2002; Moyles et al., 2002a, 2002b) revealed that when practitioners are assisted by researchers to reflect on their own practice, their theoretical knowledge is enhanced and their practice is improved.

#### **4.4. Summary**

This chapter has thrown some light on how the findings of qualitative research in general and GT research in particular can be brought forth, explaining the approach used in this thesis. Then the findings related to the first major theme, *Features of Good Practice*, have been presented and discussed with illustrative extracts from the data and in relation to relevant research evidence. The six features discussed are *Foundation Stage curriculum, classroom environment and organisation, interpersonal relationships, qualified specialised staff, observation and assessment of children, and evaluation of staff*. In the chapter that follows, the findings related to the second and third major

themes, *Enhancing/Supportive Factors* and *Difficulties*, will be brought forth in the same style.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### RESEARCH FINDINGS: ENHANCING/SUPPORTIVE FACTORS AND DIFFICULTIES

#### 5.1. Introduction

The purpose of the study under consideration has been to investigate practitioners' perspectives on good practice in the Foundation Stage (FS) of early childhood education (ECE). A qualitative approach has been adopted using in-depth interviewing and grounded theory (GT). The first three chapters of this thesis have dealt with the research background, importance, purpose and approach, the relevant research evidence, and the methodological approach and the procedures of data collection and analysis, respectively. The fourth chapter has explained how the study findings are presented and discussed using integrative diagrams and narrative style, and has presented and discussed the first major theme, *Features of Good Practice*, and its categories and subcategories. This chapter presents and discusses the findings related to the second major theme, *Enhancing/Supportive Factors* and the third major theme, *Difficulties*, and interrogates them from the perspective of relevant research evidence.

#### 5.2. Enhancing/Supportive Factors

Figure 14 shows what the practitioners perceived as the factors that enhance/support good practice in the FS. As can be seen in Figure 14, those factors are: *training, resources, positive government intervention, parents' cooperation, practitioners' feelings towards the job, and practitioners' personal qualities*. The participants described those factors as the ones that help them to work well with the children in the FS. Following is a description and discussion of those themes as perceived by the practitioners. Extracts

from the interviews are also given to illustrate their views which are then interrogated from the perspective of related literature.

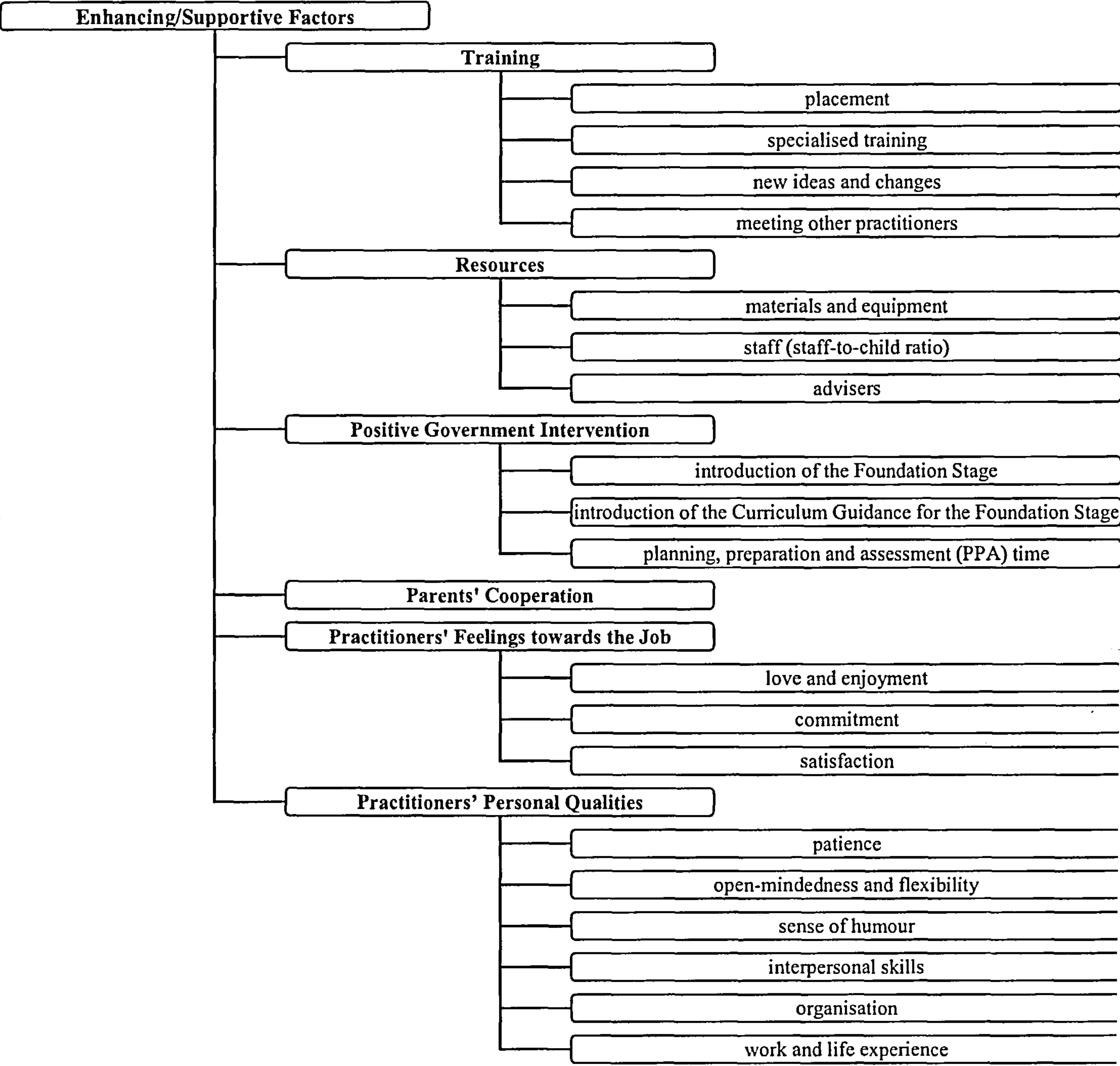


Figure 14: Enhancing/Supportive Factors

### 5.2.1. Training

All practitioners think that good initial and ongoing in-service training is one of the most important factors that enhances good practice in the FS. Most of them described the initial training they had had as useful but insufficient. Some of them recalled the *placement* they had done in different settings describing it as a very useful practical experience because they observed practitioners at work and they themselves worked with children. Most practitioners perceived that *specialised training* in early years and particularly in the FS helps considerably in doing the job well. Some of them talked about a number of specialised in-service training courses they had attended and which had been very helpful. Jill and Victoria, in particular, said that the in-service courses they had were more useful to them in practice than the initial training as those courses were specialised in the FS and more relevant to practice:

*I think a lot of the work that you do in the nursery, the training beforehand does not teach you to do. The in-service training is very relevant to the job. It provides you with curriculum-based training, particularly the Foundation Stage (Victoria).*

To ensure good practice, some teachers, particularly Jackie, Janet, Joanna and Mary, think that staff working in the FS should be trained to degree level and have high qualifications as this stage is very important and practitioners cannot work in it effectively without sound adequate training. Moreover, all practitioners, even those with long experience in the early years, viewed ongoing training as crucial as it kept them up to date with *new ideas and changes*. It also gave them the opportunity to *meet other practitioners* from different settings with whom they discussed work issues and exchanged ideas:



*Teachers like to go because they meet other teachers and they can discuss things .. They've got similar issues, similar problems you know. You can meet somebody and talk about something that's good and you can get ideas that way so it is good to go in training (Kay).*

This result concerning specialised training echoes the findings of Aubrey's (2004) study which revealed that providing specialised FS training is important to enhance good practice. It also agrees with the findings of Adams et al. (2004) that showed a perceived need for specialised training particularly with regard to outdoor play, literacy learning through play and teaching through play. However, Adams et al. were surprised that their participants did not recognise the need for training to work with other professionals or to work in partnership with parents. This finding also echoes Miller and Smith's (2004) study of FS practitioners' beliefs about literacy as they concluded that practitioners would benefit from training programmes and materials that can support them to interpret the CGFS in creative ways. This result, moreover, agrees with Mroz's (2006) study which revealed that teachers need ongoing specialised training on children's language development in order to be more able to identify and support children who have communication difficulties. Furthermore, many studies (e.g. Cassidy et al., 1995; Smith, 1997; Vartuli, 1999; Abbott-Shim et al., 2000; File and Gullo, 2002; McMullen and Alat, 2002) revealed that initial training programmes specialising in ECE had a positive impact on practitioners' beliefs and practices. Nonetheless, this result partially agrees with Blenkin and Kelly's (1997) study in which the participants viewed having well-trained and specialised staff as a factor that supports quality early years curriculum, but considered in-service training as insignificant in this respect. The perspective of some teachers regarding the importance of having highly qualified staff echoes the SPEEL findings which revealed that articulating and reflecting on one's own practice were

related to the practitioners' level of training (Moyles et al., 2002a), and the EPPE results which showed that settings having staff with high qualifications were of higher quality and that their children made more progress (Sylva et al., 2003, 2005).

### 5.2.2. Resources

There was a consensus among the practitioners that the availability of sufficient resources assisted them in their job. They explained that having adequate *materials and equipment* in the indoor and outdoor areas and having funds to replace them when they are consumed or worn out are helpful because children need to experience a wide range of materials in order to progress in the six curriculum areas of learning and development. Most practitioners think that having a generous *staff-to-child ratio*, which in the cases of most of them did not exist, would enhance good practice in the FS. They said that this would enable them to treat children as individuals and interact longer with each and every child. Certainly, this would promote children's development in all areas, especially the personal, social and emotional development, and communication, language and literacy. Some practitioners said that inviting specialised *advisers*, who could support them and demonstrate practically how to deal with some particular kinds of children such as children with English as an additional language (EAL), those with language difficulties or with social and emotional problems, would help them in their work. This, as they said, depends on the funds the schools allocate for that purpose.

Jackie, Jane and Joanna who were working in well resourced settings in all aspects – plenty of materials and equipment, large indoor and outdoor spaces, specialised training sessions in their settings, and generous staff-to-child ratio – expressed their happiness and

satisfaction about that. They said that their children benefited considerably from these resources as they were able to give them more attention and care, and had more opportunities for interacting with them and for developing their fine and gross motor skills than would be the case with regard to children in other settings that were not well resourced. They seemed more pleased about the generous adult-to-child ratio than anything else:

*The head teacher makes a very good use of the budget because she recognises that one of the most important resources you can buy is people. And that helps with things like reducing the ratio of child to adult which is so SIGNIFICANT in terms of children's development, so it's as important to provide people as anything else really (Jackie).*

These findings agree with Aubrey's (2004) study that indicated the importance of adult-to-child ratios, staff training and availability of facilities, materials and equipment. They also agree with the findings of the EPPE project (Sylva, et al., 2003, 2005) which suggest the significance of having generous adult-to-child ratios as they revealed that the most effective settings were the ones that encourage sustained shared thinking in which a child interacts 1 to 1 with an adult. The EPPE also found that early years staff need support to develop their knowledge and understanding of the curriculum content and how to introduce it to children. The findings of this study also echo the findings of Blenkin and Kelly (1997) and Keating et al. (2002) in that adequate resources were important for quality ECE, and the findings of McMullen et al.'s (2005) cross-cultural study which showed that providing concrete and hands-on materials was one of the similarities in the DAP beliefs and practices of early years practitioners in the five countries involved. Moreover, Cassidy et al. (2005) who examined the psychometric properties of the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Revised (ECERS-R) with a sample of 1313



classrooms found that Activities/Materials and Language/Interaction were two distinct factors that accounted for 69% of the variance.

### 5.2.3. Positive Government Intervention

Most practitioners think that it is good that the government intervenes in ECE in order to support good practices, cull bad ones and make things standardised at the national level for the benefit of children. Practitioners' perspectives about government intervention revealed positive and negative aspects. Here I present the positive points and in the *Difficulties* section I discuss the negative points. As Figure 14 shows, three positive aspects of the government intervention emerged: *the introduction of the FS, the introduction of the CGFS, and the planning, preparation and assessment (PPA) time*. Although indications of the importance of these recent changes were expressed by the nursery nurses, the emphasis on them occurred more strongly in the teachers' interviews.

The practitioners were pleased with *the introduction of the FS*. They said that the introduction of the FS as a distinct period of education in its own right meant that the government have started to realise the importance of ECE which had been marginalised in comparison with primary and secondary education. They were delighted that the FS enabled nursery and reception practitioners to work more closely together. In Mary's school, for instance, the nursery and the two reception classes were one unit. In Shirley's school, nursery and reception were mixed with two rooms opening into each other. In the case of the rest of the practitioners in primary schools, reception staff would go occasionally to work with nursery children, and nursery children would pay visits to reception classes in order to ease their transition from nursery to reception. Nevertheless,

while the teachers in particular expressed their pleasure with the FS, they showed their unhappiness with what followed the introduction of the FS, especially the FSP and the amount of assessment and paperwork they were required to do:

*I think having the early learning goals .. the Foundation Stage curriculum RECOGNISES it as a stage: "these children are not just playing". I think to recognise it, that was good. I think when I look at the Foundation Stage curriculum I think that's a GREAT document, then they put the profile. We are already assessing children against the early learning goals. Then they said, "yes but you've got to report that in this way for us". Then it starts to become very kind of labour intensive. We're doing the whole lot of things, you know (Alison).*

This result agrees with Keating et al. (2002) who found that reception teachers were pleased with the introduction of the FS and the closer working relationships between nursery and reception. It also echoes Aubrey's (2004) findings that the majority of reception teachers (95%) and head teachers (91%) perceived the FS as a 'good thing'. This result is also consistent with the Teacher Status Project (Hargeaves and Hopper, 2006) which included 2300 teachers from all stages and revealed that the FS enhances the status of early years practitioners. At the same time, early years teachers were more concerned than primary and secondary teachers about loss of creativity and autonomy due to the stress on meeting the demands of primary education. This finding partially agrees with Adams et al. (2004) whose questionnaire data showed that the practitioners welcomed the FS and viewed that it caused only few difficulties and challenges to schools. Yet, the interviews they conducted with the practitioners revealed the existence of difficulties and confusion with regard to the implementation of the FS especially in reception classes, and the observations showed that actual practice in classrooms did not reflect the principles of the FS.

*The Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage* (CGFS) (QCA/DfEE, 2000) was viewed as 'valuable', 'useful' and 'helpful' by the practitioners for several reasons. Firstly, it acknowledges the value of play in children's learning. Secondly, it recognises that young children learn in an integrated way. Thirdly, it provides good information and exemplars that help them in planning. Some teachers said that as long as the CGFS is seen by themselves, school management and educational authorities as only guidance and not something that they should follow strictly, it is beneficial. A few, however, said that sometimes when planning, they found it restrictive as they needed to divide things and fit them into the six areas set out in it. This finding about the usefulness of the CGFS echoes Aubrey (2004) and Hargeaves and Hopper (2006). It also agrees with the EPPE project (Sylva, et al., 2003, 2005) whose findings regarding effective pre-school provision support the approach taken in the CGFS. It, moreover, agrees with Keating et al. (2002: 193) who reported that reception teachers viewed the CGFS as useful in that 'it allowed them to return openly to what they felt to be sound Early Years practice', particularly with regard to its recognition of the importance of play. Yet, this result disagrees with Miller and Smith (2004) who, based on their findings, suggest that the CGFS can be interpreted in different ways by practitioners depending on their beliefs, training, experience and external pressure. The practitioners in this study perceived the CGFS as an asset they used in their own way to plan what fits their context and their children. Having read the CGFS, my view agrees with my participants. I think the possibility of interpreting and using the CGFS differently by different practitioners is useful as long as this leads to the benefit of the children. I think this flexibility is an advantage rather than a shortcoming as Miller and Smith seem to suggest.



With regard to *the planning, preparation and assessment (PPA) time* which is given to teachers to do planning and assessment during work hours away from children, the teachers expressed their delight about its introduction. Although they think that it is still not enough, it reduces the amount of work they do after school hours and at home:

*The PPA time is WONDERFUL, wonderful. It's just transformed what I feel as a teacher. All weekend it used to hang over me you know. I must .. I try to do the planning on Friday night and then I would think I'm not gonna plan on Saturday, and then if anybody came around to your house on Sunday or you're cooking a big Sunday dinner to the family. Oh, I think about it. I MUST get my planning done .. planning. Now I do it Friday afternoon here and all the stuff I need is here ... and if I run out of ideas I can go and look at the resources we have got here. I think it's fantastic (Janet).*

As for the nursery nurses, even though they acknowledged that teachers have more responsibility and paperwork and they need the PPA time, some of them criticised the fact that nursery nurses have not been given PPA time. They said that since they share planning and assessment with teachers and work with teachers as a team, they should be given PPA time instead of doing the planning and assessment in their own time:

*The teachers have PPA time, but we don't (laughs). Sorry, that's another sour spot. Because the three of us all work together as a team, I feel we should have planning time as well instead of spending time on the Thursday night on a voluntary basis to do the planning (Yvette).*

In view of the realities of the schools, I think the demand of those nursery nurses to have PPA time to plan as a team with the teachers is neither possible nor practical as children cannot be left with no staff during school time. Yet, I think schools that give nursery nurses more responsibilities than they should have, should make appropriate arrangements and give them a PPA time in order to treat all staff fairly and to prevent the growth of feelings of resentment on the part of those nursery nurses. From my conversations with them, I felt that some of them have already had such feelings even

though they did not say this explicitly. These feelings, however, are not mainly due to their lack of PPA time, rather to the large gap in pay as will be discussed later in the *Difficulties*.

#### 5.2.4. Parents' Cooperation

All practitioners perceived parental cooperation as one of the factors that enhances and supports good practice. As noted earlier in Chapter 4 under the *parental involvement* category within *interpersonal relationships* in the *Features of Good Practice*, practitioners said that children's parents were different in this respect: some were very supportive; some did not have the time to cooperate with them due to their work commitments, and some influenced their children's progress negatively and were difficult to deal with. Most practitioners said that with supportive parents they found it easy to tell them without hesitation about any concerns they had with regard to their child and how they could help in that at home. According to the practitioners, supportive parents were the ones who were keen to know about their child's progress and behaviour at school, and who let them know about the child's behaviour at home and any significant events happening at home that might affect the child's behaviour at school such as the presence of a new baby in the family. Those parents often attended the meetings and the sessions the school planned for them to inform them how the staff work with their child and how they can enhance that at home. Some parents also came and supported practitioners in the activities they did with the children in the class for a period of time:

*On Friday we have a session where parents are invited along either morning session or afternoon session ... You know it's really pleasing to us that the parents are coming in and working with their children. It's only an hour, but they actually come in and work with their children, and then*

*they go with \* and somebody from Sure Start and have coffee and discussion time you know. And it's really good (Bridget).*

This finding on parents' cooperation as a supportive factor agrees with the Rumbold Report (DES, 1990) and *Start Right* report (Ball, 1994) and the views of many researchers (e.g. Hurst, 1991; Rennie, 1996; Hall and Santer, 2000; Karstadt and Medd, 2000; Moyles et al., 2002a; Adams et al., 2004; Hall et al., 2005; Swick, 2006) who emphasised the importance of parental involvement and its impact on supporting good practice. It is also consistent with the EPPE study (Sylva et al., 2003, 2005) which revealed that the quality of the learning environment of children's homes promoted their cognitive and social development, and that in the most effective settings the child-related information was shared between practitioners and parents.

#### **5.2.5. Practitioners' Feelings towards the Job**

Practitioners' feelings towards their job as enhancing and supportive factors occurred in all interviews. In most cases they talked about their feelings towards their work even before I asked them. As Figure 14 demonstrates, the feelings that were frequently mentioned, and which I also noted from the way they talked about their practice were *love, enjoyment, commitment and satisfaction*.

In most cases, *love and enjoyment* came together in one sentence or in two consecutive sentences. All practitioners said that they love and enjoy their work with children. When I asked them the reason why they love it, some of them replied that they did not know. They just love small children and enjoy the way they behave and the funny things they say and do. Some replied that they love and enjoy seeing how children learn and develop



which, they said, is something amazing. The majority of them believe that people who work in early years should love the job. Otherwise they cannot do it well; they would see it as a horrible job and would not continue in it. The practitioners think that their job is too tiring and demanding to be done only for the money they earn, and there are many easier jobs they could do to get pay:

*You need to love and enjoy working with kids because once you stopped enjoying it, I think it must be a horrible job to do. (Speaks emotionally) You've got to enjoy it because it is a very very difficult busy stressful job, and you go home at night absolutely exhausted. I'm sure there must be easier ways to make living, so you've got to enjoy what you are doing (Tricia).*

The feeling of *commitment* to the job occurred in all of the interviews. Some practitioners said explicitly that they are committed to their job. In many cases, however, I felt this commitment from the way they talked about their work and from the things they had done for the children in their settings. For example, Diane, Jane, Kay and Mary had bought books and materials with their own money and brought them for the children to use. All the teachers and some of the nursery nurses usually stayed after work hours to prepare and display things in the classrooms. Shirley said she even came in during the holidays for that purpose. Maria was running a video club after school hours for the benefit of the school and she did that on voluntary basis without being paid for it. Kay and Mary had made proposals and received grants from organisations concerned with early years provision for developing the outdoor areas attached to nursery and reception classes. Mary and Shirley were making more proposals and looking everywhere to earn funds to improve and resource the outdoor areas. Alison did not usually use her PPA time for planning or assessment. She, instead, spent it working with the children with special needs in her school, and did the planning and recorded the assessment at home. Tina

voluntarily planned and ran regular sessions for their children's parents without getting any extra pay. I think all these examples illustrate the practitioners' commitment to their job and their school.

According to the participants, one of the main reasons that keeps them in their job is the *satisfaction* they get from making a difference to children. Most of them said that they get job satisfaction from seeing their children learn, develop and progress, and from their feeling that they have contributed to that progress:

*I love .. I love working in the early years and I am really enjoying it. But I think you get a lot of job satisfaction when you see the children so much, you know, learning because you start them off learning to read and learning to write, and it's great when it clicks. I think it's great, you know. It's nice. You really enjoy it (Sarah).*

Some of them said that they get a lot of satisfaction particularly when they have difficult children from socially or financially deprived families or children who have been abused and are emotionally and socially disturbed. When they see those children, who have been very difficult to deal with at the beginning of the year, coming happily and talking spontaneously to them, they feel so happy and satisfied from their work and, using Mary's words, 'feel a real sense of achievement':

*I think what I get a real pleasure out of is where I had a child who's been really quite difficult and I found it hard to make a relationship with them when I see usually later in the year (speaks emotionally) that that child is smiling ... not hitting as much and seems happier, or comes and starts speaking to me spontaneously. Then I feel a real sense of achievement (Mary).*

These findings which indicate that practitioners' emotions enhance good practice echo the conclusions that some researchers (e.g. Moyles, 2001; Bagdi and Vacca, 2006; Osgood, 2006) have drawn from their studies with early years practitioners. Those

researchers suggest that early years work demands strong feelings towards supporting children. Moyles (2001: 81), for instance, concludes that ‘it seems impossible to work effectively with very young children without the deep and sound commitment signified by the use of words like ‘passionate’’. Bagdi and Vacca (2006) suggest that positive emotional experiences shared between caregivers and children are the ‘building blocks’ for their emotional and social well-being. Osgood (2006) acknowledges the role of feelings in early years practitioners’ work, but she thinks that government intervention threatens their emotional commitment and professional autonomy, suggesting that professionalism as a government construction dismisses emotions and poses demands of accountability and what Osgood refers to as ‘performativity’. She, therefore, proposes an alternative feminist framework of professionalism that may help practitioners ‘to resist/negotiate the rapid and powerful policy reform agenda in the early years’ (p.187). In this respect, the findings of this study do not agree with Osgood’s conclusions. My participants think that their emotions towards their work enhance and support their practice and enable them to do the best they can for the children. In my opinion, when emotions enhance and support practice, they do not come into conflict with accountability and professionalism, rather they enhance them.

#### **5.2.6. Practitioners’ Personal Qualities**

*Personal qualities* were viewed as one of the main factors that help practitioners to do their job well. As can be seen in Figure 14, the qualities that practitioners perceived as supportive to good practice in the early years in general and the FS in particular were *patience, open-mindedness and flexibility, sense of humour, interpersonal skills, organisation, and work and life experience.*



The practitioners viewed *patience* as a must without which they would not be able to do the job well. They said that children in the FS are very young, dependent and needy. Nursery practitioners in particular said that most children were separated from their mothers for the first time and they were very dependent and needy, and wanted to be physically close to the practitioners all the time, especially in the first term. Therefore, they had to be patient with them and train them gradually to be less dependent:

*I think being patient is VERY important especially with the age of children we work, the reception and nursery children. They are very YOUNG and they need a lot of help and support. You've got to be VERY very patient with them and give them time to come in and settle. So patience is a very very big thing (Diane).*

Most practitioners perceived *open-mindedness and flexibility* as important qualities early years practitioners should have to be effective. They said that children are different and there are always changes and new ideas. Thus, they should be open to change and try the new ideas. If those ideas work with some of their children, they use them; if they do not work, they abandon them. They should not have a fixed idea of a specific curriculum that they would deliver to the children before knowing them. Instead, they should be flexible and, borrowing an expression used by four of the practitioners, 'go with the flow', and meet the needs and interests of the children they have in that particular year. Some practitioners think that being cheerful and having *a sense of humour* are very helpful in working with the FS children. They said that it is important that they laugh and have fun with the children because this is how children relax, learn and interact, and this also gives them some enjoyment. Furthermore, most practitioners emphasised the role of *interpersonal skills* in their work. They said that interpersonal skills are essential because they have to deal with different kinds of people: children, parents, colleagues, school management, people from social services and educational authorities, and sometimes

students who do placements. To be successful and effective in their job, they need to deal with all those people in appropriate ways:

*Early years practitioners need to be good communicators, have good communication skills to communicate not just with the children, but with adults as well. You've got parents you need to speak to. You've got the members of your team and your management, and you go to training and you do assessments and you're being involved in a WIDER multi-agency approach. Therefore, you need to have good communication skills (Caroline).*

The practitioners think that *organisation* is important for good practice in any job, but it is more important in their job. Because they have many various areas and a wide range of materials and their children are very young, they need to label, arrange and organise everything in the classroom so that children can access things easily while doing activities. Moreover, many of the activities such as painting, baking, playing with sand or water are messy. They said that they should not mind messiness as children need to experience things, but they should be efficient in tidying up and organising things after such activities. They would also encourage children and train them to help in tidying up and returning materials to their places after each activity. In addition, most practitioners said that *work and life experience* helped them considerably in their practice. They said that experience took over the training they had had. The practitioners who are mothers said that their experience in raising their own children helped them in dealing with the FS children. Some of them said that the longer practitioners' experience is, the more ideas they try and the more they learn from trial and error, and so the more they know what works well and what does not work with different children.

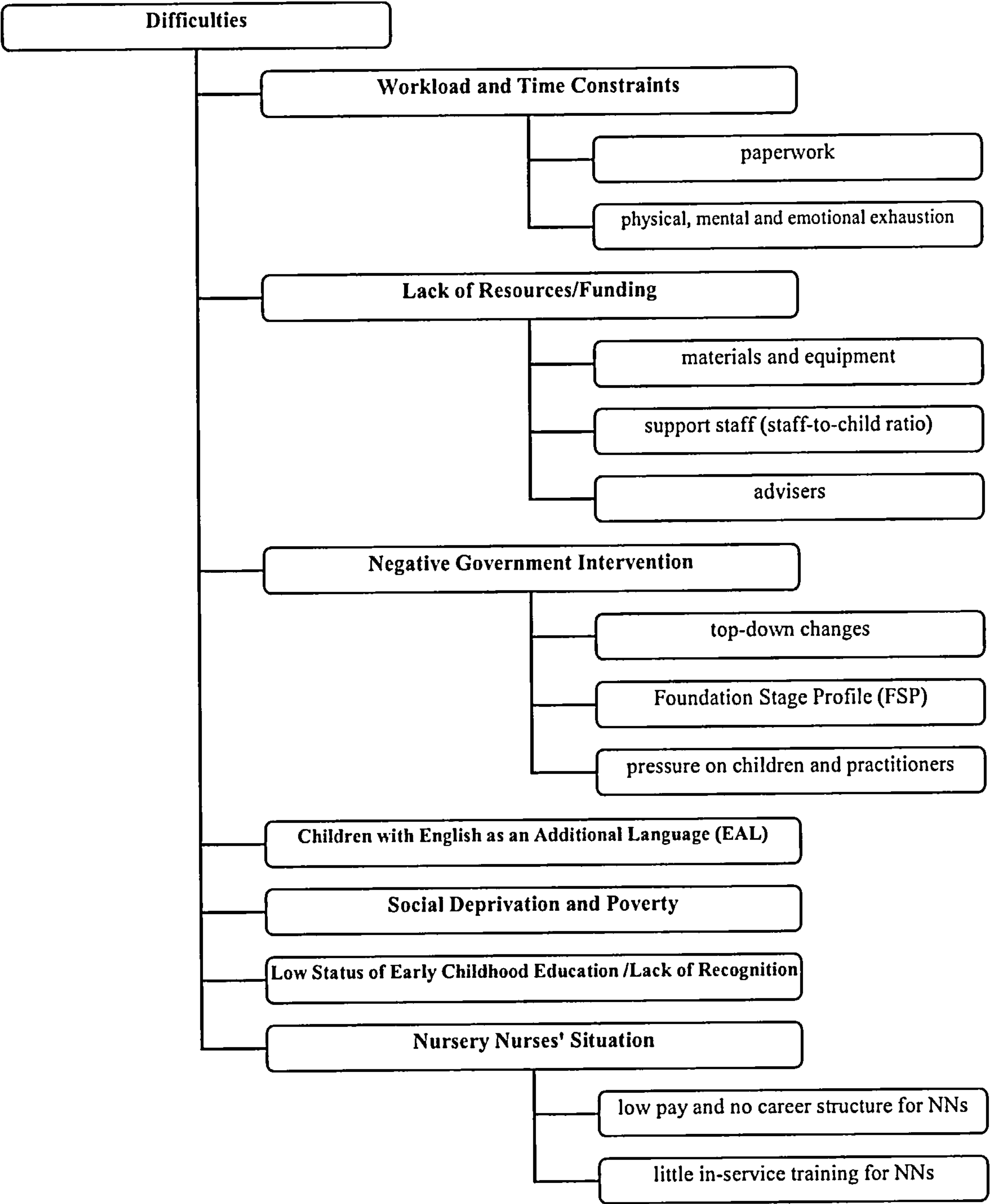
Many researchers have explicitly or implicitly suggested the importance of practitioners' personal qualities and its influence on their practice (e.g. Beaty, 1984; Ball, 1994;

Nutbrown, 1994; Edwards and Knight, 1994; Hevey and Curtis, 1996, Blenkin and Whitehead, 1996; Curtis, 1998; Moyles, 2001; Osgood, 2006). The findings of Blenkin and Kelly (1997) revealed that practitioners' qualities were the major determinant of quality ECE. The SPEEL (Moyles et al., 2002a) showed that patience, tolerance and good humour were valuable personal qualities that the practitioners brought to their job. Moreover, although the EPPE study (Sylva, et al., 2003, 2005) did not directly address practitioners' personal qualities, it found that the quality of adult-child verbal interactions, practitioners' skills in supporting children in resolving conflicts and their skills in dealing with parents and influencing and supporting the home learning environment were important factors that characterise practice in the most effective settings. No doubt, these factors require practitioners who have qualities such as patience, flexibility, open-mindedness and interpersonal skills. Furthermore, Day (1993) found that the most important impacts on teachers' professional development were their personal and professional experiences.

### 5.3. Difficulties

Figure 15 shows seven difficulties FS practitioners face in their job as revealed by the interviews. These difficulties are *workload and time constraints, lack of resources/funding, negative government intervention, children with English as an additional language (EAL), social deprivation and poverty, the low status of early childhood education and nursery nurses' situation*. Following is a discussion of those difficulties with extracts from the interviews.





**Figure 15: Difficulties**

### 5.3.1. Workload and Time Constraints

There was a consensus among all the practitioners that the workload was heavy, and most of them were not able to complete work within the school work hours. They said that the workload increased ‘a lot’ in recent years. The teachers in general and the nursery nurses who were working without teachers complained about the amount of the *paperwork* they had to do. They said that their practice and achievements with the children could be the same or even better without this huge amount of recording they were required to do. Some of them said that the time they spent in recording could be used more efficiently in interacting with the children or thinking of and preparing new activities for them:

*... there's never enough time. Em I mean with children we do as much as we can, but time wise again because there is so much writing before and after, so our energies are wasted on the writing I think (Shirley).*

The practitioners also said that their job is too *tiring physically, mentally and emotionally*. Most of them viewed it as physically tiring as they were moving and interacting all day without pause. Some of them perceived the job as being mentally and emotionally tiring because they found themselves thinking about it and new ways of doing it most of the time, and they felt emotionally involved with the children and sometimes with their families. Bridget, Caroline, Diane, Jane, Mary, Valerie and Yvette said that their job is ‘emotionally tying’ and that they really found it very difficult to ‘switch off’ after leaving school:

*It [the job] is tiring. It's emotionally draining because children want your attention all the time. So you go home and you just wiped out because you might get a physical job but you have people talking at you and wanting you and needing some of you all of the day and you don't have the option with children to say "I'm not now", you know, "give me 5-minute pause" because your job is to be with them, to provide that for them. You are to an extent their carer ... You get very involved with the children and their families really ... it's hard to switch off sometimes when you go home*

*because at the end of the day we can just shut the door and go home but still their situations and circumstances and .. you know .. sometimes .. you have to carry on. And that what's the provision is for (Caroline).*

Moreover, one of the emotional difficulties Yvette faced in her job was her inability sometimes to treat the children fairly as she felt more protective towards the disadvantaged children. Janet and Valerie, who had been working in the mainstream school and had moved recently to work in the FS, said that working in the FS was more difficult and demanding than in mainstream school because there everything was clear and they knew exactly what they wanted to do and they expected a certain level of behaviour from the pupils, but in the FS most of the time they felt unsure about whether they were doing the right thing. Valerie, who was working in the nursery for the first time, said that although she loved the children, she was not sure how long she could do the job because she found it too demanding, 'too tiring' and 'exhausting'.

It seems to me that the practitioners' complaint about the amount of paperwork which has recently increased and the physical, mental and emotional exhaustion they feel reflect a tension or a dilemma within themselves and their settings between meeting the official demands imposed on them on the one hand and their emotional commitment and inner drive to meet children's interests, ensure their happiness and spend time interacting with them, on the other. This tension is highlighted by Moyles (2001), Wood and Bennett (2001), Keating et al. (2002), Aubrey (2004), Adams et al. (2004), Miller and Smith (2004) and Osgood (2006). I think this tension also exists within the FS official documents. The CGFS, for example, supports integrated play-based curriculum, meeting children's needs and interests and treating children as individuals. Yet, it prescribes and itemises the outcomes and assumes that most children should achieve the early learning



goals by the end of the FS. This tension becomes clearer in the FSP which prescribes and itemises the outcomes much more, and requires a lot of time and assessments to be completed. Moreover, the realities in most schools make things even more difficult for the practitioners. Reception teachers, for instance, are still required to do the Baseline Assessment in addition to the FSP which should have replaced it.

### **5.3.2. Lack of Resources/Funding**

As discussed in the *Enhancing/Supportive Factors* section, the availability of enough resources was perceived as a supportive factor for good practice. Similarly, lack of resources was viewed as a difficulty that affects good practice. Most practitioners said that they did not have enough *materials and equipment* to cater for children's needs and interests. Some complained about lack of *support staff* and the *staff-to-child ratio*. A few practitioners expressed a need for specialised *advisers* to give them practical support and advice.

Most practitioners said that the *materials and equipment* they had were not enough for the children. They explained that there should have been adequate funds specifically allocated to replace the materials that children consumed and to buy new books and toys because children got bored from seeing the same books and playing with the same toys:

*There isn't enough money. We would love to have loads of beautiful things for children to play with but we've got to make the best of what we've got, and we have to be CAREFUL how we spend our budget and make sure that we spend it in the right way and that what we buy is gonna be useful to the children (Maria).*

As for the lack of *support staff and the staff-to-child ratio*, some practitioners said that there was a need for more staff to support them as this would make the staff-to-child ratio better. In fact, in the majority of the practitioners' settings the ratio was 1 to 13 or 1 to 14. In Janet's case, however, the situation was different. She often worked with 26 reception children as she shared a part-time nursery nurse with the other reception teacher who also had 26 children. Janet wondered about government priorities in funding. She said that while there were lack of support staff and lack of books in her school - a big primary school - vast amounts of money were spent on ICT (Information and Communications Technology):

*... a LOT of money has been spent on computers recently in this school. There has been no limit to the amount of money the government has provided for computers. Yet, I can't see a single piece of work has been inspired by anything we found in the computer (Janet).*

Mary shared this same view with Janet concerning government priorities in providing money. She said that while she was searching everywhere to try to get money to improve the outdoor area, every classroom in her big school, including the nursery, had a whiteboard as the school was provided with money to be spent specifically on ICT. Some practitioners, particularly Deborah, Diane and Valerie said that it was rare to have specialised *advisers* coming to the setting to provide help and support because the schools needed to pay for that. They said that on the occasions when they had advisers, they were really helpful. Yvette said that she had never seen any adviser in the nursery where she had been working for a long time.

This result echoes Aubrey's (2004) findings in which head teachers and reception teachers described lack of facilities, equipment and materials, shortage of support staff

and poor adult-to-child ratios as of the main problems they faced in the FS. Aubrey also suggested that there is a need to continue providing practitioners with specialised training. Keating et al. (2002) indicated that there was lack of resources in terms of equipment and staff. Moyles et al. (2002a) revealed that some settings lacked or did not have outdoor facilities, and that some practitioners, especially in reception, found it difficult to treat children as individuals due to the poor adult-to-child ratios. Miller and Smith (2004) concluded from their findings that there is a need for providing practitioners with training materials and programmes specialised in the early years. Furthermore, Mroz (2004) found that teachers lacked the specialised training that enables them to identify children who have language difficulties. The EPPE project (Sylva, et al., 2003, 2005) suggested the importance of having generous staff-to-child ratio in the light of its findings that the quality of adult-child interactions and the amount of 1 to 1 sustained shared thinking between adults and children were related to better cognitive and social/behavioural development.

### **5.3.3. Negative Government Intervention**

In the *Enhancing/Supportive Factors* section I presented the positive aspects of government intervention in early years as expressed by the practitioners, pointing out that they were not averse to this intervention as they realised that it aimed to raise the quality of ECE. They, nevertheless, had some criticisms about it, particularly with regard to the *top-down changes*, the *Foundation Stage Profile (FSP)* and the *pressure it added on children and practitioners*.



Most practitioners criticised some of the *top-down changes* that the government continuously introduces and requires schools to apply. Most teachers gave the literacy hour and the numeracy hour as examples of such changes. When Literacy and Numeracy Strategies were first introduced, reception practitioners were required to give their children an hour of literacy and an hour or 45 minutes of numeracy every day. The teachers who had been working in reception said that they had never applied those hours because it had been a wrong decision for reception-aged children, and so the government changed it later. Practitioners were then applying most of the Literacy and Numeracy Strategies in a flexible way:

*It was quite formal when the government introduced the Literacy Strategy and the Numeracy Strategy, and in reception we were expected to do an hour of literacy and an hour or 45 minutes of numeracy which left no time for anything exciting ... but now it's more integrated. We read a big book every day. We do phonics game and we have about 20 minutes of maths together on the carpet. We do a lot of maths activities, and literacy activities. They [the children] all do in small groups through the day at different times, so it's completely integrated day for the children and they get a lot of opportunities to play and make their own choices of what they want to do (Kay).*

Most practitioners think that such decisions reveal the fact that policy makers are not fully aware of what is going on in the schools, as anyone working with children knows that a 4-year old child cannot sit for an hour and receive a chunk of language or mathematics. They think that when the government intends to make changes, they should know the realities in the field and consult practitioners. Some teachers, particularly Alison, Beatrice, Jane, Joanna, Kay, Mary and Sarah wondered if policy makers seriously take teachers' views into account before introducing changes. They said that they have never been asked about their views concerning anything although they have been working for many years. They also think that the top-down changes ignore the

differences between schools with respect to their children and resources. They said that they like and want the government to provide them with guidelines and new ideas and research findings that help them in their work, but they do not like to be obliged to do specific things. In the end, the decision should be left to them to decide what is appropriate for their children in order to achieve the goals required in the light of the guidelines and the documents provided by the government. They, moreover, said that they have the knowledge, the experience and the commitment to provide their children with the best possible opportunities:

*I don't like the way they say "you MUST do this". I think they can recommend ... I think the government can recommend but I don't think they should be too prescriptive because I think you have to allow for the teacher's personality, the personalities and needs of the children that you have that particular year, which may be completely different every year. So I think that they need to train teachers and they need to trust them, to trust that the teachers will do their best (Jane).*

The *Foundation Stage Profile (FSP)* (QCA/DfES, 2003) was criticised by the teachers and the nursery nurses Jill, Tricia and Victoria. As discussed in Chapter 4 of this thesis under *observation and assessment of children*, they think that the FSP is a good indicator as to what most children should achieve by the end of the FS. Yet, filling it in is not easy for several reasons. Firstly, it is long and it requires large amount of observations and assessments. Secondly, some of its statements are not clear and can be interpreted differently by different practitioners. Thirdly, some of the objectives of the FSP are too demanding for practitioners and children as they are higher than what a 4-year old child can achieve, and this puts them under pressure. They think that the FSP should be revised and refined:

*It's crazy the amount of assessment and paperwork that you're expected to do by the end of the reception ... I think the profile is too much ... The profile takes an AWFUL long time ... I think it's got to be trimmed down ...*

*The big problem with the profile is that I feel it was introduced before they actually refined it enough, so when you look at the statements they're very unclear as to what you mean (Mary).*

Most reception practitioners said that the objectives they were required to achieve put *pressure on them* and they exerted that *pressure on children*. They, for instance, withdrew children from the play activities which they enjoyed and were interested in to teach them literacy and numeracy formally especially at the last term of the reception year in order to prepare them for year 1, facilitate their transition to the formal teaching in year 1, and achieve the objectives required by the end of the FS. Some practitioners expressed their dislike of how the government compares schools as this adds more pressure on them. They said that schools are different and their children are different, and that even within the same school in the same class, children have different starting points in terms of age and abilities. They explained that some children cannot achieve the required goals whatever the practitioners try with them because they are still at a very young age, younger than their peers in the class, and these are their natural abilities at that age, or because they do not have the home care and support that their peers have:

*I don't think all schools should be put under the same umbrella. It depends on what the starting point is of the child and how much progress they make. They might seem that they've not made a lot of progress but when you look at their starting points, they might make huge progress (Sarah).*

These findings partially agree with David et al. (2000) (cited in Miller and Smith, 2004) who found a discrepancy between early years practitioners' expressed belief that literacy should be developed through play, and their observed practice in some of the settings where they took children from their play to do formal, focused tasks. The practitioners in this study said frankly that they did do some formal teaching of literacy and numeracy for short periods of time as they had to achieve the requirement of the CGFS and the FSP.



This ties in with David et al.'s findings which revealed that the reason why practitioners gave formal teaching was the requirements of the CGFS which would be inspected. This also echoes the findings of Adams et al. (2004) who revealed that reception practitioners experienced pressure from their colleagues in Key Stage 1 to prioritise children's achievement in literacy and numeracy and learning particular school routines. It also echoes the findings of Miller and Smith's (2004) study of early years practitioners' beliefs about literacy as they showed that there was a pressure on the practitioners from the demands of the primary school curriculum and the CGFS which is linked with the National Curriculum. Furthermore, the top-down changes and the pressure they placed on early years practitioners as a result of the demands it posed on them were highlighted by Moyles (2001) and Osgood (2006). Yet, to the best of my knowledge, no study has dealt with practitioners' concerns about the FSP in particular.

#### **5.3.4. Children with English as an Additional Language**

One of the notable features in the UK is the cultural diversity. In Newcastle, for instance, there are people from many different backgrounds who came here for study or work, or as refugees and asylum seekers. There are also families who had been in Newcastle for a long period of time but some of them do not have good English because they have been using their native language at home and within their relatively closed community. Therefore, most schools in Newcastle have children with English as an additional language (EAL). The numbers of those children, however, vary from one school to another depending on the location of the school and the population of its area. For example, in the settings of Alison, Jackie, Jane, Janet, Joanna, Tricia and Yvette, EAL children did not cause any difficulty because, as the practitioners said, there were very

few of such children and their parents had good English and were very supportive of them. On the other hand, in the settings of Beatrice, Bridget, Deborah, Jill, Maria, Mary, Shirley, Tina, Valerie and Victoria, there were considerable numbers of EAL children, and some of them were new to the country. Those practitioners said that this caused them difficulty as they did not know the languages of those children, and they needed to prepare a lot of visual aids and use gestures and body language most of the time to help the children understand what they were saying. They said that most children with EAL were intelligent and they pick up the language quickly, and that they usually made notable progress with those children. Nevertheless, the practitioners explained that it was difficult to make EAL children achieve all the goals of the FS curriculum by the end of the FS because the starting points of those children were completely different from those of English children whose parents speak English. Some practitioners complained that inspection does not take this fact into consideration as they treat all schools in the same way, which affects the results of the schools which have considerable numbers of children with EAL although the staff in those schools, as they claimed, work harder and achieve more progress with the children than the schools which do not have children with EAL.

Bridget, Deborah, Jill, Mary, Tina and Valerie explained that knowing about children's cultures enhanced their practice with them. Bridget, Mary, and Tina said that they had good knowledge about their children's cultures from the home visits and the parents with whom they had good relationships. They also said that parents who have good English would happily volunteer to interpret for other parents who did not know English. In the cases of Deborah and Jill, the situation was different as they said that they did not do

home visits and they did not have knowledge of their children's languages or cultures. They explained that they sometimes even found it difficult to tell parents frankly about some concerns they had regarding their children because of the language and the cultural barriers. They said that they needed more help to work effectively with children with EAL, and wished that there were resources that informed them about their children's cultures and advised them as to how they could deal appropriately with those children and their families:

*I would feel happier if we had more EAL help ... If we had more resources, books, key words, pictures .. just more resources to be able support them more and know about their cultures. There are so many different cultures that we don't know about .. that we need to know more information to be able to make these children feel more secure that I know about them as much as I know about the English children. Personally I feel I need to know more about that (Deborah).*

This result agrees with the EPPE project (Sylva, et al., 2003, 2005) which indicates that specialised support, especially for language and pre-reading skills, benefits children with EAL and those from disadvantaged backgrounds. The diversity in English society is recognised in the FS official documents. For instance, one of the principles of ECE set out in the CGFS (QCA/DfEE, 2000: 11), as noted in the second chapter of this thesis, states:

No child should be excluded or disadvantaged because of ethnicity, culture or religion, home language, family background, special educational needs, disability, gender or ability.

The CGFS also provides some guidelines as to how to deal with children with EAL. In this regard, however, Siraj-Blatchford (1996) discusses that despite the existence of three major Acts of Parliament that acknowledge and offer practical measures to remove discriminatory practice (Race Relation Act 1976, Education Reform Act 1988 and



Children Act 1989), overt and covert discrimination against blacks and ethnic minorities still exists in early childhood practice in Britain. The findings of this study disagree with Siraj-Blatchford (1996) as the practitioners having children from different cultural backgrounds said that they treat all children the same regardless of their cultures, beliefs and languages, and that they respect all beliefs and cultures. What I personally saw in some schools supports what they claimed. In those schools welcoming phrases, notices, and labels are written in different languages, and the displays on classroom walls show and celebrate diversity. Yet, whether or not practitioners actually provide a discrimination-free environment in their interactions with children verbally and nonverbally is something I cannot comment on in this study. This is left for studies that use classroom observation and which examine the views of children and their parents. Certainly, I think it is crucial that practitioners treat all children fairly and provide good models in their behaviour so that children and their parents will trust and respect them. Without doubt, trust is an important foundation for building good relationships.

### **5.3.5. Social Deprivation and Poverty**

Some practitioners, particularly Alison, Bridget, Maria, Mary, Shirley, Tina, Tricia and Yvette, expressed that one of the difficulties they faced in their job was having children who were living in difficult situations: children whose parents did not have decent social skills, children whose parents were financially and socially poor, children who had only one parent and who were living with their mothers, children who had been abused and were living in care, and children whose parents were too busy to look after them as they should have. These practitioners said that they always tried to do their best for those children to make them happy while they were in the school:

*Some children come in a bad state you know. They haven't got breakfast and their clothes are dirty, and you really feel with them. Sometimes they come with a T-shirt on them and it's a freezing, a cold day you know; they've got no socks on ... I would just cuddle them and make sure they're happy while they're here. I do my best for them while they are here ... and some of them are really disturbed and it is hard, and you have to try and cut up at home time. You can't take all this home with you, you know. It's hard but it's strange how life goes on. And you can see them come back the next day and they're happy to see you, and you know this makes all the difference (Bridget).*

Those practitioners said that they got a lot of satisfaction from making a difference to the disadvantaged children they had. They felt emotionally involved with these children. They liked to help them in any possible way and they made efforts to do that. Yet, the difficulty they faced in dealing with those children became more when their efforts with them did not succeed as they liked because of the negative influence of the children's homes and social surroundings:

*We have some success with all children. I'd be lying if I say we've got all children happy and everything is working well. We're only a small part of a child's life ... We try to give children a safe place, a school where they feel safe, they feel accepted and that you do like them (Mary).*

This result echoes the findings of the EPPE (Sylva et al., 2003, 2005) which revealed that pre-school provision had a positive impact on children's development, especially that of disadvantaged children. The EPPE indicates that while pre-school provision does not eliminate disadvantage, it helps to ameliorate the effects of social disadvantage and it has a positive impact on children's progress over and above family influences. The EPPE therefore concludes that the investment in good quality pre-school provision can be an effective means to break cycles of disadvantage. In this regard, research evidence shows that pre-school programmes were originally initiated to improve the lives of disadvantaged children (Spodek and Brown, 1993). The High/Scope Perry Pre-school

Project, a longitudinal study in the US context, proved that high-quality pre-school programmes provide short and long-term benefits to poor and at-risk children (Hohmann and Weikart, 1995).

### 5.3.6. Low Status of Early Childhood Education

There was an agreement among the practitioners that the importance of ECE was still not well-recognised by the government, educational institutions and the community, and this had a negative influence on the status of early years practitioners. Some of them felt that the government has recently started to recognise the importance of ECE, and the introduction of the FS was a good step forward in this direction. Yet, they explained that this recognition was still not enough in comparison with mainstream education:

*I don't feel they [early years practitioners] have the same status as people working in the main school. I feel as if they feel that early years is not seen as being that important you know. The main education starts in Key Stage 1, and that doesn't just come from .. within the school. You get feelings like that from local authorities and from the government as well. And it's only been really since the Foundation Stage that the focus has been shifted a bit to early years. But even with that if you look at the way the Literacy Strategy hit the press, the amount of discussion from politicians. It was a very high profile, LITERACY STRATEGY .. NUMERACY STRATEGY. Foundation Stage! I don't think many people know about that, and it was a BIG, supposedly a BIG step forward for early years and gave a lot of status and importance to early years. I don't think it's recognised as such nationally, and I think that felt down to schools (Mary).*

The practitioners in primary schools said that they were not given the same importance and credit as their colleagues in Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2. This view occurred strongest in Janet and Valerie's cases as they had been working with Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 and had moved recently to the FS. Both said that although their work in the FS was more tiring, they did not feel that they had the same status as before:



*I don't feel I have the same status now as when I was in further up in the school .. I feel less (laughs) ... I think the year 6 SATs is seen as the pinnacle of achievement in primary schools and the closer you get to that the more important you're seen in the school (Janet).*

Valerie's case was a clear illustration of the ignorance of the importance of ECE in part of some schools. Valerie had worked for five years in Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 in her school and had never thought of moving to the FS as she had not received any specialised training for it. At the beginning of her sixth year, her school needed a teacher for the nursery class of 39 children. No one of the teachers was willing to work in the nursery. Therefore, the head teacher gave this responsibility to the least experienced teacher and the last one who joined the school staff. That teacher was Valerie who had to accept it.

Furthermore, some practitioners think that most people do not consider FS teachers, especially those working in nursery, as 'proper' teachers and they underestimate how difficult and demanding the work is. Most people think that FS practitioners do an easy 'light-hearted' job as they only play with small children. The practitioners said that they were proud of working in the FS. They also emphasised the importance and the demanding nature of their job which should be recognised by others. Yet, reading between the lines, I could see that the words of most of them implicitly indicate that they themselves viewed their job as less important than their colleagues in the other stages. Personal lives and family commitments of some practitioners made them satisfied with it:

*I have a young family and this suits me at the minute. Maybe when my family grow up ... maybe I'll get ambitious again then but at the minute I am quite happy (Jane).*

Such indications occurred in most of the interviews. Even in the cases of Jackie, Joanna and Mary who were highly regarded by their head teachers and colleagues, something I

felt during my visits to their schools and from the facilities and the conditions of their interviews. Jackie and Joanna made several references to the fact that they sometimes gave training sessions for practitioners in other schools and were currently doing a masters degree. Mary referred many times to her past experience as a secondary school teacher and coordinator, and her current position as the early years coordinator and an influential member in the management team in her school. I think such indications do not necessarily mean that the practitioners were lying when they said that their job was very important and demanding and they were proud of doing it. I think these contradictions between their explicit and implicit meanings reflect a tension between their own perspectives on their job and the official and social perspectives which they were very aware of and influenced by. Moreover, this tension made me unsure whether the respect and the good status that Jackie, Joanna and Mary enjoyed in their schools were due to their positions and achievements as FS teachers or to the other positions and factors they referred to. If the second explanation is the true one, then their cases are but further examples of the low status of early years job and its practitioners.

Many researchers (e.g. Edgington, 1998; Moyles, 2001; Hargreaves and Hopper, 2006; Osgood, 2006) have discussed the low status of early childhood practitioners and the lack of recognition of their important work by the public. Based on the demographic data from the Teacher Status Project which used a survey and interviews with teachers of different stages, Hargreaves and Hopper (2006) found that 93% of early years teachers were women compared with 69% of all other teachers; 45% of them had a Certificate of Education compared with 28% of other teachers; 53% of them had a degree and a teaching qualification compared with 70% of primary teachers and 81% of secondary

teachers. According to Hargreaves and Hopper, the fact that the majority of early years teachers are women, many of whom have low-level qualifications is a barrier to their job being recognised as a high-status profession. Hargreaves and Hopper's findings revealed that early years teachers perceived more respect from people inside the school and 'school associates' such as parents, than did secondary teachers, but they perceived less respect from the media and the general public. The findings of this study partially agree with those findings as most practitioners were of the opinion that their job is undervalued by all parties: the government, schools, parents, the media and the general public. Hargreaves and Hopper also found that teachers perceived the introduction of the FS and the CGFS as an asset to their status. This study revealed similar findings in this respect.

### **5.3.7. Nursery Nurses' Situation**

The situation of nursery nurses seemed problematic. The main qualification all of the nursery nurses, except Caroline, had was the Nursery Nurse Examination Board (NNEB). Nevertheless, Jill and Victoria were working with nursery classes without teachers. Deborah had worked in a nursery without a teacher, but in her current school she was working with a teacher. Tricia was responsible for a reception class but in collaboration with the teacher of the other reception class in her school. The rest of the nursery nurses were working with teachers. Each was responsible for a group of children for whom she made individual folders and assessments, but the formal assessments and reports were recorded by the teachers. They also participated in the planning which was recorded by the teacher.



All of the nursery nurses said that their *pay* was very low in comparison with the work they did and with the teachers' pay. Some of them also complained that they *did not have a career structure* so they were stuck as nursery nurses year after year at nearly the same salary with the addition to a slight annual increase. The strongest complaints about the situation came from Jill, Victoria and Deborah who had the experience of having teachers' responsibilities with the nursery nurses' pay. They wondered why they were not paid for the extra work they were required to do:

*In my other school ... there wasn't a teacher in the nursery. There were only nursery nurses. We were two nursery nurses and we had to do the job of the teacher but we got NO extra money ... Whereas here I do the assessment; I help with the planning, but I also get no extra money. We are not recognised for what we are. For a LONG time nursery nurses have just been the people who help, and that's why I am doing my degree. For 18 years nothing has changed. The pay increases just slowly slowly but still nothing of what the teachers are on (Deborah).*

Deborah and Jill, who were currently studying to get degrees, said that the main factor that made them think about doing a degree was their situation as nursery nurses. They explained that if their pay had been high, they would not have thought of that because it was not easy for them to work and study at the same time in addition to the other personal commitments they had, and also because they really loved their job and they would stay working with FS children after getting the degree:

*If I was valued, if I went to the school as a nursery nurse and was valued as a teacher, I wouldn't want to go back to college and do it. But if I went to the school and I was a nursery nurse and was doing the job that the teacher was doing but only got the nursery nurse's wage then I would go back to college to be a teacher ... I think I will always work with children, and I don't think I will want to be a head teacher or a deputy where they're stuck in their office and don't have much to do with children (Jill).*

Tricia attributed the whole bad situation of the nursery nurses to the government. She said she was happy in her school with her colleagues. She had no problem of being

responsible for a reception class and she had been doing that for many years as the other reception teacher was very supportive of her and they all worked as a team. Tricia thinks that the government should recognise the value of nursery nurses and increase their pay.

In the cases of the nursery nurses who were working with teachers, the degree of complaints about the situation varied and that was due to the characteristics and influence of the teachers whom they supported. Strong complaints were expressed by Yvette who had a previous experience of working with a support teacher who was not specialised in early years. She said she had been telling that teacher what to do, and yet that teacher's pay had been double or more than hers. Yvette said that she had taken industrial action in the past about the nursery nurses' situation and she would do that again if she thought it would be of value. She thinks that nursery nurses should be valued and recognised as qualified educators for the specialised initial training they had, the NNEB. With the current teacher, Yvette was happy because this teacher was specialised in early years and they worked very well together. Maria was not satisfied with the pay which she perceived as very low in comparison with the work she did, but she said that the teacher she supported had much more work and responsibilities. Bridget, Caroline and Tina would like to have more pay, but they said that they were satisfied with their pay in their schools because they were happy with the teachers with whom they were working for three reasons. Firstly, the teachers did the majority of the planning, assessments and any other paperwork, and worked harder than them. Secondly, they respected the teachers for their knowledge, experience and the ongoing support they gave to them. Finally, the teachers treated them as equals, included them in the planning and assessment, consulted them with regard to anything related to the classes and respected their views. They, moreover,

said that the teachers with whom they were working deserved a higher pay than them because of their qualifications, knowledge, experience and the responsibilities they had:

*It [the pay] could be a bit better maybe if you compare it with the teacher. But the teacher has an awful more responsibility. You know at the end of the day everything stops with the teacher. Anything happens is the teacher's fault you know. And she has all the reports to write. She has all the planning to do. Even though she gets things from us as well, it's her who has to do it and gives it all ... I think I'm fortunate here. I respect the teacher that's here for the depth of knowledge that she has, and I see the work she does (Bridget).*

The teachers' views about this situation agreed with the nursery nurses. Most of them said that nursery nurses were undervalued and low-paid, and that although their experience increased, the increase in their salaries were very small as they had no career structure. Some teachers explained that they undoubtedly had the ultimate responsibility and deserved more pay. They, however, felt that there should not be this big gap in pay between teachers and nursery nurses as it could cause feelings of resentment in some settings, particularly when the teachers are not competent enough to work in the early years. They said that nursery nurses' pay should increase and they should have a career structure:

*I think my nursery nurses are UNDERPAID and their work is UNDERVALUED because I couldn't do without them and I expect them to do far more, and they all work far more hours than they are paid for ... I think they are not paid for what they are doing and they don't have a career structure ... I think they are undervalued, underpaid and overworked (Alison).*

As for the *in-service training of nursery nurses*, the nursery nurses were divided in their views about it. While some of them said that there were enough training courses for them, others said that there were only few courses and they would like to have more:



*We don't go on many training courses. The head teacher tries to send us on them when he can, but there isn't many courses for nursery nurses as there are for teachers (Tricia).*

In their comments on this point, some teachers said that the in-service training offered to nursery nurses was very little in comparison with that offered to teachers. It seems that the in-service training depends on the budget each school allocates for it and on the availability of support staff to replace the nursery nurse who goes out for training as, in most cases, schools need to pay for the training courses and sometimes for additional support staff.

My own interpretation of this result concerning the nursery nurses' situation is that there is something wrong happening. I am not aware of the content of the initial training of nursery nurses, particularly the NNEB. Yet, if that initial training qualifies nursery nurses to plan for, run and assess FS classes on their own, then they are treated unfairly and are really undervalued. If, however, that training does not qualify them to work with classes on their own, but only to support teachers, bearing in mind that they may be offered little in-service training, then there are groups of children in the FS who are being educated by unqualified staff. This is obviously a striking contradiction with the features of good practice revealed in this study and stated in the CGFS (QCA/DfEE, 2000), *Start Right* report (Ball, 1994), and the writings and findings of many researchers (e.g. Bruce, 1987, 1997; Athey, 1990; David, 1993; Nutbrown, 1994; Hevey and Curtis, 1996; Pugh, 1996; Blenkin and Kelly, 1997; Sylva, et al., 2003, 2005).

## 5.4. Summary

This chapter has dealt with the factors that impact positively or negatively on good practice in the FS. In other words, it has presented and discussed the two major themes that emerged from the data: the *Enhancing/Supportive Factors* and the *Difficulties*. The *Enhancing/Supportive Factors* include training, availability of adequate resources, positive government intervention, parent's cooperation, practitioners' feelings towards their job and practitioners' personal qualities. The *Difficulties* include heavy workload and time constraints, lack of resources, negative government intervention, children with English as an additional language, social deprivation and poverty, the low status of ECE and nursery nurses' situation. These factors and difficulties have been also discussed in relation to some relevant research evidence.

## **CHAPTER SIX CONCLUSIONS**

### **6.1. Introduction**

This is the final chapter in this thesis which has detailed the research study that has examined practitioners' perspectives on good practice in the Foundation Stage (FS). In this thesis, the research background, importance, purpose and approach have been clarified in the first chapter; a review of relevant research evidence has been provided in the second; the methodological research approach and the procedures of data gathering and analysis have been explained in the third, and the research findings have been presented and discussed in the fourth and fifth chapters. In this sixth chapter, a summary of the main findings and comments on them are given. The limitations of the study are also discussed. Then the novel aspects in the study that make it a good contribution to the educational field in general and the field of early childhood education (ECE) in particular are highlighted. After that, based on the research findings, a number of recommendations are made. Finally, some insights into how this study, undertaken in England, can be of benefit in Jordan are provided.

### **6.2. Good Practice: Summary and Comments**

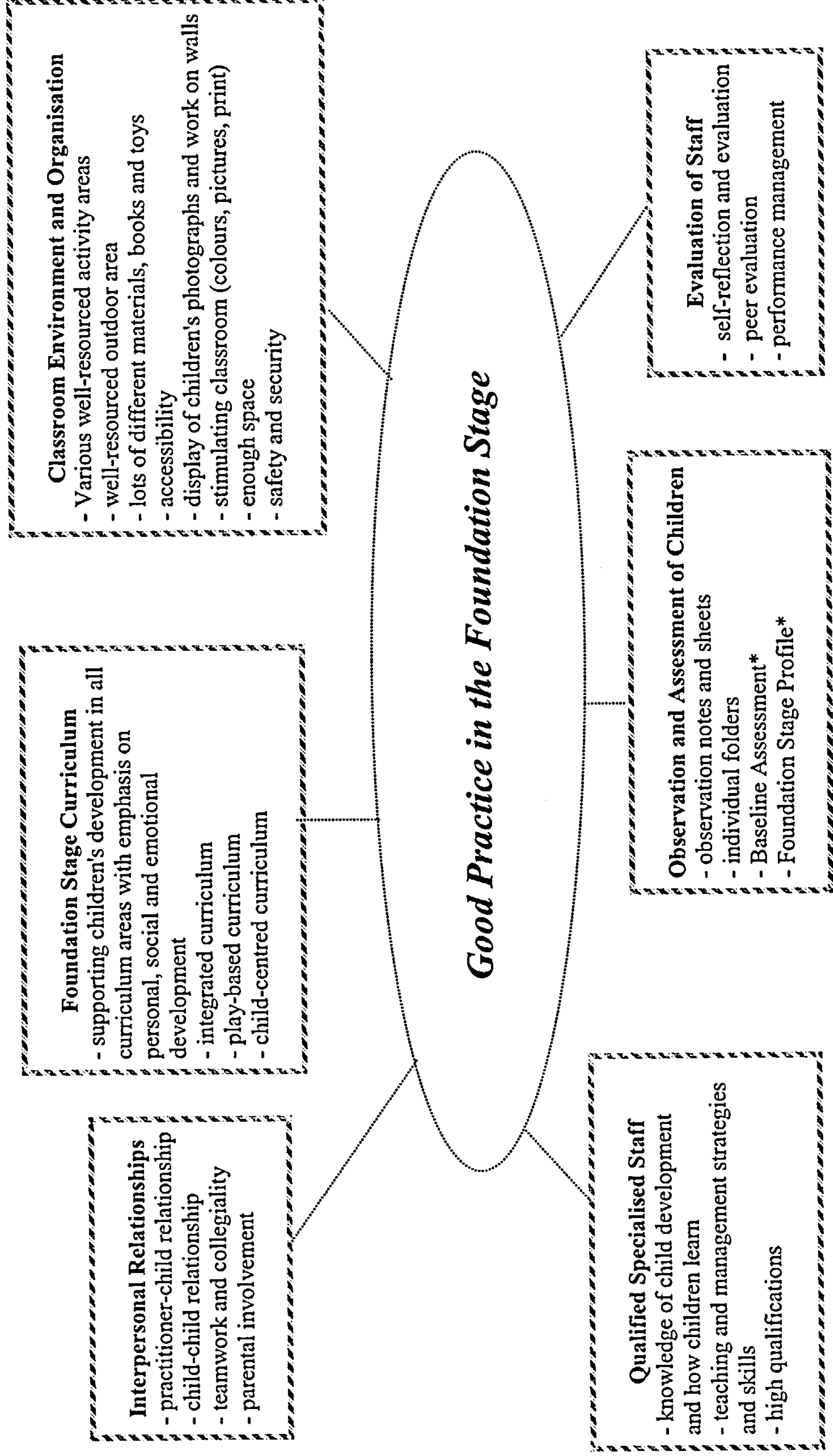
This piece of research has attempted to answer the following questions:

- What are the features of good practice in the Foundation Stage from practitioners' point of view?
- What are the factors that enhance/support good practice in the Foundation Stage?
- What are the difficulties that practitioners face in the Foundation Stage?



As for the first question, the study revealed six features or elements that must exist for FS practice to be good. As Figure 16 shows, these are: an integrated, play-based and child-centred curriculum that places emphasis on personal, social and emotional development, effective early years environment, good interpersonal relationships between all parties, qualified specialised staff, ongoing observation and assessment of children, and evaluation of staff. With regard to the second question, six main factors were found to be important in enhancing/supporting good practice in the FS: training, resources, positive government intervention, parents' cooperation, practitioners' feelings towards the job, and practitioners' personal qualities (see Figure 14 in Chapter 5). Concerning the third question, seven main difficulties emerged from the data: workload and time constraints, lack of resources/funding, negative government intervention, children with English as an additional language (EAL), social deprivation and poverty, the low status of early childhood education and the situation of nursery nurses (see Figure 15 in Chapter 5). Obviously, the features of good practice, the enhancing/supportive factors and the difficulties are interrelated and interactive.

Now I think I am in a position to point out what dimensions of educational practice the practitioners' account includes and emphasises. As Alexander (1992) suggests, any account of educational practice includes five dimensions or considerations which are all important but not equivalent: *value, empirical, conceptual, political and pragmatic* (see Figure 2 in Chapter 2). Does the account of good practice revealed in this study include these dimensions? Which of these dimensions does it emphasise? And does it reconcile the competing aspects in these dimensions?



**Figure 16: Good Practice in the Foundation Stage**

\* The practitioners had some concerns and suggestions with regard to this point. See Chapters 4 & 5 for details.

The features of good practice revealed and the numerous extracts from the interviews given in Chapters 4 and 5 clearly illustrate that *value* and *empirical* dimensions have an outstanding position in this account. The practitioners' prioritisation of personal, social and emotional development of children, for instance, indicates their emphasis on value and ethical considerations. The practitioners' view that good early years curriculum is a child-centred curriculum that considers and caters for children's needs and interests, their perception of observation and assessment as a means of informing their planning, and their reflection as individuals and teams on the effectiveness of the activities they offer to children to promote their learning and development demonstrate that empirical considerations are paramount in their account of good practice. It is noteworthy in this regard that this empirical dimension is based on the practitioners' experience. It is mainly based on their observations and evaluations as individuals and teams. It does not, for instance, incorporate evidence from empirical research findings that have revealed which practices are most effective in promoting children's learning and development. The *pragmatic* dimension also exists in the practitioners' perspective of good practice. It is evident in their awareness of the conditions, opportunities and constraints in their settings such as time and resources (e.g. staff-to-child ratios, materials and equipment, indoor and outdoor space). Therefore, they plan what they think works in their context, and try to do the best with what is available to them and their children. Furthermore, the *political* dimension is clearly apparent in the practitioners' view of FS practice, and is perceived as being useful but simultaneously placing pressure on them. It is demonstrated by the requirements and demands of the government (e.g. the *Foundation Stage Profile* (FSP)), the schools/settings (e.g. paperwork and Baseline Assessment), and parents, the community and colleagues working in Key Stage 1 (e.g. preparing children for Key Stage



1). The political considerations place pressure on the practitioners and consequently on the children. As for the *conceptual* dimension, it seems to be limited to what the practitioners have received in initial and in-service training courses. Some of them even think that those are not always beneficial to them because they do not take into account the different circumstances in which practice takes place. Some practitioners seem to dismiss the conceptual dimension as mere theory. Some, however, recognise its importance but do not have the time to consider it. Many practitioners said frankly that they have not read a book for years, and they have no idea about the educational research that has been conducted or is being undertaken and they do not read research because they are too busy and too tired to do that.

In my view, the practitioners' emphasis on value and empirical dimensions in their account of good practice indicates that this practice is substantially good. Yet, their preoccupation or even their obsession with pragmatic and political considerations, mainly the constraints and the pressures of the circumstances in which they work, has its influence on the empirical dimension and the conceptual dimension which some of them dismiss. It seems to me that it is not easy for the practitioners to reconcile the five dimensions or considerations and this consequently causes a tension or a dilemma within themselves and their settings. This tension or dilemma is reflected in the difficulties they pointed out and elaborated on in the interviews. I think the government, training programmes, and research institutions have a role to play in this respect as they should help practitioners reconcile those dimensions and overcome the tension with which they struggle. How can this be done? There is no ready answer for this question and no magic

recipe for this complex situation. Nevertheless, the suggestions given in the recommendation section in this chapter may perhaps help in this regard.

### **6.3. Research Limitations**

As any research effort, this study has some limitations. In this section I will highlight and discuss two main points in this respect. The first is associated with the size of the sample and the second is related to the research method. As for the sample size, the participants in this study are 21 early years teachers and nursery nurses working in the FS in Newcastle. Even though this sample size is not small from the viewpoint of the qualitative mode of inquiry, it is statistically not representative to all early years practitioners in the FS. Therefore, I do not claim that the findings of this study can be generalised, especially in the quantitative sense. As I noted earlier in the third chapter of this thesis, when I embarked on this qualitative study, generalisability was not an aim. My aim was to understand and explain good practice in the FS and what impacts on it from the perspectives of the practitioners who work directly with children. In other words, in this qualitative research, using Strauss and Corbin's (1998: 267) words, I was 'talking more the language of explanatory power rather than that of generalizability'. It is hoped that in this thesis I have offered some degree of explanatory power which may be of use to interested parties in a wider context.

With regard to the method, I used the in-depth interview for gathering data. Therefore, the findings of this study were based on what the practitioners said. In this respect, it is noteworthy that some studies which used both interviews and observations (e.g. Bennet et al., 1997; Keyes, 2002; Moyles et al., 2002a; Adams et al., 2004) revealed the existence

of some discrepancies between practitioners' expressed perceptions and what they actually did in their classrooms. Bennet et al. (1997), for instance, found that some of the play episodes they observed were not consistent with what their participants said. Keyes (2002) revealed that some teachers themselves were surprised from some of their practices when they watched the videotapes of their own classroom sessions. Adams et al. (2004) found significant discrepancies between the data gathered by the three methods they used: the questionnaire, the interview and the observation. In light of such studies, my findings are subject to interrogation by research studies that employ observation as a research method. Therefore, I recommend researchers interested in early childhood education (ECE) to make observations in FS settings to examine the actual practice and compare it with the expressed perspectives I arrived at in this research effort. However, having used observation before, I would raise the following questions. To what extent do observations give insights into actual practice? How many sessions should the researcher observe to be able to judge or conclude whether the practice is good or not? To what degree do researchers' own perspectives and biases intrude in their interpretation of what they observe whether it is videotaped or not? In my opinion, these questions and many similar ones endure concerning any piece of research and whatever method is used, qualitative or quantitative. It is only that such questions would be phrased differently due to the differences in the research topics examined, the theoretical perspectives adopted and the methods used. Any research approach, as Silverman (2005: 83) suggests, 'contains seeds of further problems'.

I think limitations in research will endure because, at the end of the day, we as researchers are human beings and in the educational field we also research human beings.



True, we are empowered by our minds, hearts and senses which are gifted to us by our God. Yet, those gifts, as our Creator tells us, are not perfect, and hereby we are not perfect and we cannot achieve perfect work or construct perfect knowledge and truths by our limited abilities and capabilities. Sometimes, at the end of a research study I think of its value and ask myself using T.S. Eliot's verses:

And would it have been worth it after all,  
Would it have been worth while?

I answer myself, 'yes, it would', and go on with my work. I think, in the research we undertake using God's gifts to us, we try to achieve a greater understanding of our world hoping that this might improve the way we live and make our world and lives better. Maybe that is why the more we research, the more questions we raise and the more we know, the more we realise that we are ignorant and need to research and know. Perhaps the end of this cycle for each one of us is what T.S. Eliot expresses in these verses:

All our knowledge brings us nearer to our ignorance,  
All our ignorance brings us nearer to death.

## **6.4. Research Contribution**

As with any research enquiry, my study is a contribution that benefits from and builds on the earlier contributions of other researchers. Therefore, I do not claim that I have come up with anything revolutionary in this research study. Nevertheless, I think there are novel aspects in it that make it a good contribution to the educational field in general and the ECE field in particular. The novelty in this study is evident in the depth in which the topic has been addressed and in the methodological approach used for addressing it.

With regard to the research topic, as far as I know, no research study has addressed educational practice in the FS and what impacts on it from practitioners' (teachers and

nursery nurses) perspectives in the depth done in this study. In the SPEEL project (Moyle et al., 2002a) for instance, practice was one of the areas that comprised the Framework of Effective Pedagogy. This framework, however, was the outcome of the data gathered by different methods: literature review, interviews with head teachers/managers and practitioners, parent questionnaire, analysis of the documentation available in the settings involved and video-stimulated reflective dialogue, whereas the findings of this study emerged from the interviews conducted with the practitioners, and which were validated by different techniques detailed in Chapter 3. Other studies in the FS context have touched upon some aspects of educational practice, but their areas of focus were different from this study. For example, the EPPE study (Sylva et al., 2003) examined the effects of pre-school education using quantitative and qualitative methods. Using structured interviews with head teachers and reception teachers, Aubrey (2004) focused on the challenges faced in the implementation of the FS. Adams et al. (2004) explored the implementation of the FS in reception classes using a questionnaire and interviews with head teachers, reception teachers, teaching assistants, FS governors, and local authority and EYDCPs (Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships) personnel, and observations in some reception classes. Keating et al. (2002) investigated reception teachers' views about the CGFS. Miller and Smith (2004) addressed teaching literacy in the FS, and Mroz (2006) was concerned with children's speech and language development and difficulties. In fact, the depth with which I addressed FS practice resulted in some findings that had no mention at all in previous research studies such as the situation of nursery nurses and the shortcomings of the FSP, the main document used for the assessment of children in the FS.

As for the methodological approach, although the GT approach has become popular in doing qualitative research, to the best of my knowledge, no study in the educational field had used the GT approach in the way I did. Having designed my study, I tried to find a study in education that had used GT approach as I planned to use it to benefit from it, but I was not able to find such a study<sup>1</sup>. My approach is characterised by the following two main points. Firstly, I did not begin my research with a hypothesis or a specific set of questions. I began with a purposefully broad question, then the narrow research questions evolved during the joint data collection and analysis, and all the main themes or categories and their subcategories emerged from the data. Moreover, a major feature of the interviews I conducted with the practitioners was the organic nature of questions which I explained in Chapter 3. What I noticed in most studies that had employed the GT approach is that the researchers had started with specific research questions and a number of themes or categories generated from related literature or the researchers' own experience, or by the use of another method such as focus groups or nominal group technique. Secondly, I used the GT coding techniques, constant comparative analysis, memo writing, diagramming and theoretical sampling in conjunction. As far as I know, combining these procedures and techniques has not been done in any research study in the educational field. Having highlighted the novel aspects in my line of enquiry in this study, I would point out that I do not claim that my approach is better than those used by other researchers as I think that they are all different modes of enquiry and alternative ways of undertaking research. I just try to show the uniqueness of my approach especially in education. To put it metaphorically using Robert Frost's verses,

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<sup>1</sup> I searched theses and databases I have access to. I also asked my supervisors who have a good research and academic experience and some other researchers I have contact with in order to find a study that used the GT approach in a way similar to what I planned to do, but I did not find any in the educational field. I, however, found some studies in other fields of social sciences.



Two roads diverged in a wood, and I –  
I took the one less traveled by,  
And that has made all the difference.

To sum up, the depth to which I tackled the topic of this research and the approach I used in undertaking it, indicate the uniqueness of the study and demonstrate its contribution to knowledge in the educational field in general and the field of ECE in particular. Furthermore, I think the unique approach used in this research can make this thesis an example that research students may benefit from in conducting and reporting qualitative research.

## **6.5. Recommendations**

In light of what the study has revealed, the following recommendations can be addressed to policy makers, teacher training institutions, researchers and research institutions and early childhood practitioners in England.

**The status of ECE:** The importance of ECE has recently been recognised in the political and educational agenda. This recognition was demonstrated by the introduction of the FS and the *Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage* (CGFS) (DfEE/QCA, 2000). Nevertheless, it has not yielded the desired effects on the public, the media and schools. For instance, the lack of attention the media paid to the FS and its importance, the ignorance of the public of the influence of ECE, and most importantly, the practices of some head teachers who recruit unspecialised practitioners in the FS and prioritise other stages of education at the expense of the FS, reflect the fact that the significance of early years education is still not well recognised, and this impacts on the status of ECE and its

practitioners. Therefore, further steps should be taken by the government to support and promote the status of ECE and to raise the awareness of the public, head teachers and practitioners in schools with regard to the importance of the FS for children's overall development. This can be done through the media and the channels available for such purposes. In the case of schools, it can also be done through training courses offered to head teachers who are the school leaders.

**Training:** The study revealed the important role training plays in enhancing and supporting good practice. Thus, initial training of early years practitioners should not be less rigorous than that of primary and secondary practitioners, and should include specialised courses in ECE and in the FS in particular. Furthermore, initial and in-service training should also provide training that deals with the different concerns and difficulties that practitioners may have such as dealing with children with EAL or with special needs and disadvantaged children and families. Based on what the study revealed that practitioners do not read books or research and many of them are not concerned about the conceptual dimension that can benefit them in their work, training courses should provide them with a strong theoretical base that underpins their practice in addition to the practical elements such as placements which the practitioners perceived as useful and helpful.

**Top-down changes and the FSP:** The practitioners were not averse to government intervention in ECE. On the contrary, they were happy with that. Nevertheless, most of them criticised some of the demands imposed on them such as the large amount of paperwork and assessments, especially the FSP. On the basis of these views, I

recommend that policy makers explore practitioners' opinions with regard to the recent changes that have taken place and seriously consider their concerns and suggestions. Moreover, practitioners should always be actively involved in any innovations and changes. In this respect, it is noteworthy that the research studies funded by the government and which involved early years practitioners (e.g. Moyles et al., 2002a; Aubrey, 2004; Sylva et al., 2003) demonstrate the government increased awareness of the importance of practitioners' views and its concern about exploring and considering them.

**Nursery nurses' situation:** The situation of nursery nurses in schools should be studied and appropriate decisions and actions should be taken to improve it and ensure that nursery nurses are not treated unfairly, and that no groups of children are at a disadvantage by being taught by practitioners who are not adequately qualified.

**Self-reflection and action research:** Self-reflection is considered as an essential element of good practice by most practitioners but it seems that it is not well utilised due to lack of time and/or lack of knowledge and help. In this respect I suggest two points. Firstly, practitioners should be encouraged and helped to be self-reflective by teacher trainers, advisers and head teachers. Specialised teacher trainers and advisers can provide practitioners with information and training that help them in this regard. Secondly, educational researchers should assist practitioners to be action researchers in their own classrooms and to analytically and critically examine their own practice and its influence on their children. The cooperation between practitioners and researchers can serve two purposes. On the one hand, it can help practitioners to improve their practice and support their professional development. On the other hand, it can empower practitioners and



enable them to participate in research and introduce their theories and practical knowledge which could be, as Anderson (1982: 130) writes, 'of far more use than the elaborate theories of sociologists, philosophers, psychologists, curriculum innovators, historians and educational technologists'.

**Social problems and family role:** The study revealed that some of the difficulties that early childhood practitioners face are related to social problems such as poor parenting, child abuse and single-parents. No doubt, early years settings and educational institutions at all levels are very important and have their impact on children, the future generations that constitute societies. Yet, I think homes are very influential in the upbringing and 'shaping' of those generations, and families including fathers and mothers who respect family values and are committed to their children are the cornerstone of good societies. This is my view and I fully realise that it is influenced by my Islamic belief that sanctifies good family values and my life experience of living in a warm supportive family. Therefore, I recommend policy makers and researchers in England to turn some of their efforts to exploring the position of the family, family values and people's attitudes towards having and raising children, and the factors that affect these important issues in English society. Moreover, educating parents by providing them with advice, guidance and formal and informal training sessions that give them information about the childhood stage, how influential their role on their children is, and how they can support their children's learning and development is important as some parents do not have the knowledge and the skills that enable them to raise their children well and cannot access these without help and support. It is noteworthy that the efforts of Sure Start in the

integrated early years centres and its support and cooperation with the schools that arrange sessions for parents, are good steps forward in this regard.

**The impact of educational practice:** In light of the findings of this study and the research evidence that proves the impact of ECE on children's future learning and lives, it is important that early years practitioners realise their influence on children as they lay the foundation for their future learning and lives. I think in early childhood and in all educational stages, what is important is not only the content that practitioners deliver, but also how they deliver it and how they deal with those whom they teach, so it is essential that they try to provide good models in their actions and behaviour. Brookfield (1995: 26) writes that 'through their actions, teachers build or diminish the amount of trust in the world'. Although he mentions this in his writing about university teachers, I think it is of relevance to all educators at all levels. Obviously, children in schools are the input of universities and the output of universities are educators in schools. Things, therefore, are much more interrelated than some may think. Finally, I would like to say to practitioners that teaching is an art as well as a science and their task is a serious one. It is, using Joseph Conrad's words in 'The Task of the Artist', 'less loud, more profound, less distinct, more stirring ... its effect endures forever'.

## **6.6. From England to Jordan: Final Thoughts and Insights**

The reason behind undertaking this research study in the UK has been to have some knowledge and understanding of the British expertise in pre-school education, particularly the recent developments in England in order to benefit from that in developing teacher training courses to prepare qualified teachers specialised in ECE in

Jordan. After I have completed the study, it is worth discussing what I have achieved in this regard. I think the relatively large amount of readings I did from different sources and kinds of publications for this study, the visits I made to the early years settings, the interviews I had with the practitioners, my analysis of those interviews and the results I arrived at have all enriched my knowledge of the ECE field in general and the recent developments of the provision in England in particular. They have also widened and deepened my understanding of the competencies, professional and personal, that training programmes should help student practitioners develop so that they can work effectively with children.

Certainly, I am fully aware that there are differences between England and Jordan and, therefore, what is implemented in England cannot be copied literally and implemented in Jordan. For example, there is a big difference between the two countries in terms of funds and resources. Even though most practitioners in this study complained about lack of resources, from what I saw in their classrooms and schools I think if a Jordanian state school has one-third or even less of the resources available in the least resourced school of those, it will be considered as being very well resourced. In fact, lack of resources in Jordanian schools maximises the need for well qualified, competent and committed staff in order to compensate for that and provide children with the best possible learning opportunities. However, in the current educational system in Jordan, children begin their statutory compulsory basic/primary education at the age of six which is about a year later than it is in England. This means that in Jordan, children who join the pre-school stage, which covers the two years preceding statutory school age, are older than FS children in England. This, and the fact that the majority of Jordanian children live in caring



supportive families with their parents and usually a sibling or more, are helpful to Jordanian pre-school practitioners. Despite the differences between the two countries in economic, educational, social and cultural contexts, there are similarities and shared grounds. The most important shared reality is humanity. In England, in Jordan or in any part of the world, children are children; children are human beings. Their basic developmental needs are similar and many of the learning opportunities offered to them in their early years can be similar even though they are performed in different languages and within different cultural and social contexts.

In this regard, some researchers such as Cannella (1997) deconstruct the ECE field and question its underlying assumptions and epistemologies. Cannella thinks that power relations have fostered one group's constructions over those of other groups and calls for reconceptualising the field to foster social justice and accept and value multiple realities and perspectives of the world. I agree with Cannella that diverse constructions and multiple perspectives should be understood and appreciated. Yet, I think there is no harm in considering and understanding the dominant perspectives that she criticises and taking from them what can be appropriate and beneficial to children from any group in any part of the world. I think rejecting something just because it originated or developed in the West or in the East is not a wise view as the progress that people enjoy nowadays in various fields are cumulative efforts and contributions of people from different races, beliefs, cultures and parts of the world. Those contributions had begun since the dawn of human history and will probably continue till the Day of Judgment. Moreover, even within every culture there are assumptions and constructions that should be deconstructed by the members of that culture themselves. Furthermore, in this age of globalisation with

its pros and cons, people of all cultures should ask themselves what kind of generations they like to see: generations who value and can live 'well' only within their own culture or generations who are tolerant of other cultures and can live within and cope with any culture without losing the best values of their own.

In Jordan, for instance, in this age of satellites and the internet and rapid change, children as well as adults have access to everything happening in the world with its pros and cons. One of our main concerns as educators is how to help our children have faith in their noble Islamic values and Islamic Arab civilisation and, at the same time, be tolerant of other beliefs and appreciate other civilisations and benefit from them. Doing this requires preparing practitioners who have the knowledge, values and skills that enable them to be effective in supporting and promoting children's intellectual, physical, personal, social, emotional, spiritual and ethical development. This, of course, requires effective well designed training programmes and teacher trainers who can inspire student teachers and help them develop good competencies. Designing and delivering such programmes are part of the duties of the department in which my colleagues and myself are working. I feel that having some knowledge of the English experience in ECE and an understanding of the views and concerns of some practitioners about early childhood practice will benefit us in our mission to prepare early childhood teachers who, we hope, will develop the competencies that enable them to provide the best possible learning opportunities for children.

In the end, let us, educators and researchers, hope that by our attempts to improve educational practice in early childhood, we contribute to the development of new

generations 'better' than ours to inherit this world in which human creativity has reduced the material distances between its countries, but, regrettably, some people's interests, prejudices and selfishness have increased the affective and interpersonal distances among its people. What has happened and is still taking place in the region where I live, the Middle East, is the most painful example to give. Perhaps, through education we can reduce this affective and interpersonal distance.



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# **APPENDICES**

Appendix A: Transcription Conventions

Appendix B: Two Interview Transcripts

Appendix C: Two Examples of Interview Summaries and  
Practitioners' Responses



# APPENDIX A

## Transcription Conventions<sup>1</sup>

WORD	Capitals, except at the beginning of sentences, abbreviations and words whose initials are usually capitalised, indicate strong emphasis.
(word)	—Words in parentheses contain the researcher's descriptions rather than transcriptions.
*	Asterisk indicates a person's name which was removed for confidentiality.
..	Two dots indicate a short pause.
(pause)	The word 'pause' in parentheses indicates a relatively long pause.
-	Hyphens indicate interruptions and overlapping.
( )	Empty parentheses indicate an utterance removed for confidentiality or because of the researcher's inability to hear what was said.
“ ”	Quotations indicate that the speaker quotes someone else, parodies what someone else said, or expresses an inner voice in her head.
. , ? !	Punctuation indicates speaker's intonation.

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<sup>1</sup> Most of these transcription conventions were adapted from Poland, B. (2002) Transcription Quality. In Gubrium, J. and Holstein, J. (eds.) *Handbook of Interview Research: Context and Method*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.

# **APPENDIX B**

## **Two Interview Transcripts**

Interviewee: Shirley (Teacher)

Qualifications: BA in Education

Teaching experience: Nine years (Three years with year1 and six years with reception and nursery)

Age: Forty-nine years

Omayya: At the beginning please tell me about your teaching experience. How long have you been teaching?

Shirley: I've been teaching since 1997, so That's about nine years now and all that time I've been with young children em just from year 1 and then I came down to nursery and reception, and I've been in nursery and reception now em for six years, in the Foundation Stage.

Omayya: And your training?

Shirley: I did four-year Bachelor of Education ( ). I was quite old at that time. I was thirty-seven when I went to university, but I'd done A-levels and things at school ( ).

Omayya: Tell me please about your practice in the Foundation Stage. How do you support children's learning and development?

Shirley: Oh, so wide question.

Omayya: Yeah.

Shirley: The Foundation Stage in this school is mixed of reception and nursery together. We have myself as a teacher and two nursery nurses to support. Most of the curriculum is done through PLAY activities, so the children learn from being together, from adult input .. em from activities designed to make them ask questions, basically to get them thinking and learning for themselves. Em .. reception HAS to have a more focused curriculum where we have to do literacy and numeracy, probably as a separate part of the Foundation Stage. But all other subjects are mixed together and they are done mainly through play activities, so children sometimes don't even know that they are learning and it's enjoyable so that they want to come to school; they want to learn; they want to be with their friends and so it makes a nice experience to them.



Omayya: Literacy and numeracy .. do you teach them formally or also integrated with other things?

Shirley: The reception children are withdrawn for part of the morning to do FOCUSED activities for literacy and numeracy, and because they have to start learning letter sounds and how reading is formed and how writing is formed. And again a lot of it is through games: board games, dice games. Maths especially we do it with dice games and dominoes and the cards .. very PRACTICAL activities because they are too young to be really starting with very formal writing and number work and .. so it is done a lot through games and fun things so that they are enjoying it as well as learning.

Omayya: The Foundation Stage curriculum is organised in six areas of learning. How do you deal with these areas?

Shirley: The areas are planned for throughout the year and that yearly plan is broken down into half terms so that six-week chunks at a time, and then that's broken down into weeks and daily things. And the FOCUS is different perhaps for each half term and .. maths may be a shape to half term where we do number as well but the focus is gonna be on shape. So each area is broken down to try and cover throughout the year everything. But a LOT of things such as personal and social things continue throughout the year starting from day 1 and it's just a continuous programme where it's dealt in everything we do. To cover it there is a lot of planning, but a lot of things are quite spontaneous as well. Ah .. you may plan to go down one area and the children might take it off somewhere else. So there is no problem in following that as long as you can still get back to where you were, where you're heading for in the first place. So it's all split down into the six areas over a year and then broken down into smaller chunks to try them and make sure that children get them really broad and balanced.

Omayya: You said that personal, social and emotional development continues throughout the whole year and in everything. How do you develop this aspect?

Shirley: Well, children who come to nursery sometimes don't want to leave MUM. That's the FIRST job is to get them comfortable to be WITH YOU, to stay here and their parents leave and let them get into play. Then it may be that they don't MIX

easily with other children, perhaps they had no other children at home to play with, so we help them develop relationships with other children. Little things like em coming together to sit down is very difficult for three-year old who doesn't want to sit down at that point (both laugh). So it is learning ROUTINES and developing relationship between the children and the practitioners, the teacher and the nursery nurse, where they are comfortable and confident to talk to you. Some children don't like talking to adults they don't know. Every child is so DIFFERENT that we try to obviously take the child as they ARE and try to develop their personal things. Sharing (laughs) is very difficult to three-year old. If you have your own toys at home and suddenly all these toys here are for everybody to share. To learn to share is very difficult. So every child is different so every personal social skills going through are DIFFERENT for each child in many ways. But then we have the collective things you know: we all share; we all sit down for our milk; we all try and listen to a story, which is a quiet time .. very difficult (laughs) when you're three. So .. em it slowly builds till in reception children know that they will have quiet time sitting, listening, developing listening skills. Em again young children .. sometimes listening is not something that they used to doing very easily, so we do games for listening skills em .. pass the Teddy bear and talk and get them to talk to. Little ones sometimes imitate adults so being down at their level and talking to them are important. Personal skills come through ALL the different, you know, through maths, literacy, physical, creative, their talking, their listening. Personal skills are everywhere in whatever you are planning.

Omayya: What about the classroom. How do you arrange it?

Shirley: It's in em a sort of areas, so it's not wide open. Em it has little areas to go to. We have a wet area where we have painting, water play, sand play and dough. There is also junk modelling, collage. So that's all in the wet area which is at the bottom end in our nursery. Then we have a HOME corner where the children can role play being mums, dads, sisters or whatever they want to be, and they dress up as a policeman, a fireman, fairies and all sorts of costumes, so they can .. become something different and they use the language in a different context. Em .. construction areas and then small play areas where we have cars, trains and houses. A quiet area with books, pencils, papers, things that we can sit down and have a quiet time. Em .. the reception

has a QUIET area for teaching as groups together and a smart board with computers. Writing tables at the top again mainly used by reception where they are doing letter formation and doing games on the tables. And we've got another role play here which is to do with the topic of whatever em half term topic we're doing, and another role play there to develop their language and their personal skills and their knowledge and understanding. So it is in little areas where children can do different activities.

Omayya: When working with the children and planning for them do you personally have a certain philosophy or certain theories? Do you have anything like that that underpins your planning and your work?

Shirley: Well, I think our main philosophy is really that every child is INDIVIDUAL and you try to make the child progress from where they are. Em .. and every child would be different and we have lots of learning strategies and lots of underpinning theories about education and how children learn. And you will use whatever is appropriate to that child, so with a child that has em difficulty listening or understanding English you will use a lot of pictures, actions and many physical things that the children can relate to. I think the underlying thing here is that every child is different; every child is an individual and it causes a big push at the moment throughout Newcastle with "every child matters". Em so it is very much the individual approach as to how you make that child progress, but in the early years it's definitely through PLAY and not too formal at all. Yeah, it must be through FUN PLAY activities to help them to learn.

Omayya: Em so you may choose from different things .. choose what suits the children? You do not for example have in mind any certain approach or apply any certain approach such as High/Scope or anything like that?

Shirley: No, we may use parts of High/Scope but we are not a High/scope nursery. Some of those em .. theories and, you know, practices may work for some children, but it's not .. we don't go down the line of High/Scope here. Em it is very much sort of families. We try to get families involved .. have all the children as happy as they can be and look at them individually, and whatever works for one child may not work for another. We try and balance that.

Omayya: Your relations with families .. do these relations help with children?



Shirley: Yeah, if parents are comfortable being in the school and talking to the teachers, it is very much easier for the child in the school and for the parents and for the teacher .. em because if you have a concern about a child, you can talk to a parent easily, you know, there is no confrontation of any sort. If they are happy to come into school, it is much better for the child that we can work together and parents can really reinforce at home what you are doing in school and vice versa, and parents who're having problems at home with the child .. if they can come and talk to you, you can try and reinforce what they are doing at home. It keeps stability for the child. So we try to encourage parents in as much as we possibly can. I mean they come every morning to bring their children and they go home and they collect them every night from the classroom. That time, first thing in the morning, last thing at night is TIME for parents to talk to teachers if they want to. They are WELCOME to come into the nursery if they want to come in and work with the children for half an hour or one afternoon. We regularly do em sort of parent friendly things where parents can come and help with a fun afternoon or something like a project they do.

Omayya: Do you arrange sessions, meetings, things like that?

Shirley: Yeah, for parents to come in and work in the nursery with their children or outings. We go out and ask parents to help to do that. So the more they can be involved, the better.

Omayya: Do you make home visits?

Shirley: We don't. A lot of nurseries do. I think that is quite a good thing because the parents are more relaxed in their own home. Em but because we are a small school ( ), we don't have many teachers, so to release someone to go out and do home visits just isn't practical. But we DO bring children in for visits two or three times before they start nursery. So parents can come in and stay with them in the nursery and have a short visit so that the child is more comfortable when they do start, so they have quite few visits before they actually start.

Omayya: Now, the curriculum which you apply, the Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage which contains the six areas. What do you think of it and what do you think of the government intervention in early years in general?

Shirley: (Laughs) Em .. I think early years NEEDED some guidance because a lot of nurseries were operating under many different curriculums, which meant that children started at school and reception from so many different backgrounds and there was very em little continuity with what was happening with children in nurseries. So in one way, yes I do approve that it is very good; it sets down exactly what children need to have and what they need to do. Sometimes, especially when I get to reception I find it becomes a bit restrictive that children HAVE to do certain things by the time they leave reception. And all children won't make it to that level which that's the nature of the children; they are different, so that's not the problem. Em but sometimes I do feel that whereas the children might want to go off onto one area and they get involved in it, we've got to stop them and pull them back because you know you've got to move in and cover the curriculum. So sometimes it can be restrictive but in general I would say it is a good idea and it is a good foundation for the children moving up to the main stream school.

Omayya: Em .. how do you evaluate the children and assess them to know whether they have reached a certain level?

Shirley: We do LOTS of assessments (laughs). We do daily assessments, which are basically notes that we make of children when they do something particular, you know, that we can judge as being what the next step they need to do, so there is daily assessment by all the three of us. We have formal assessments and formal baseline aspects. We have the Baseline Assessment, which is a government-led assessment. We have half-term assessments and it is mainly focused on literacy, numeracy and science, em but with the little ones it's also on the personal and social. Basically there is a lot of writing so that each child builds up a file and we try to get evidence in each area: photographs, observations, pieces of work they have done which might be a painting, you know, where they've used pens and pencils and mark makers. So you build up a profile, which is the other assessment (laughs) em of each child so you know what they are capable of and where their next step is. So again it is very individual, but there is a LOT of writing (laughs) em to keep up the assessments for children. But in one way it is very good because you do know exactly where each child is and you know from observations not just em the ability to count or the ability

to write their names. We do know how they INTERACT with other children because you can quickly jot that down and it's recorded in their file, so you know that their personal and social skills are recorded as well as everything else because sometimes that's quite difficult to record .. the personal, social and emotional skills.

Omayya: How do you assess and judge these?

Shirley: Well. If they're playing in a group together, say they're in the logo for instance and you might have three children there and they all want a particular thing, maybe a tree or something like that. If they all go for it and then one child might say, "Oh, all right you can have it because I'll get this", then you know that that child learnt em to negotiate or to share, to find alternative ways and not just screaming .. calling, you know, "I'm stronger than you. It's mine". So just by watching them at play and if you devise activities to say things in turns talking to each other and listening into conversations when they are in the role play, you will find out a lot about how they are learning, what they know, what they need to go into. So we do a lot of observations and quickly jot them down because although you might KNOW the children very well, with thirty-six children you will forget little things, so we try and jot down as much as we can and stick it in their files.

Omayya: Do you find it easy for you with thirty-six children to do observations and assessments and write everything?

Shirley: Observations are brought into our planning. Every afternoon one of us will be observing while the other two are working with the children. Em that's probably three afternoons a week so that one person is observing and writing while the other two are working with the children. So it's weaved in the planning. We also have little posted notes everywhere that if you are working with a group or just watching what's going on beside, something happens you can just quickly jot it down and then it sticks into their file just on the back of the pages in the file, so we've got quite a comprehensive idea of what the child is doing, what they are capable of.

Omayya: You said you fill in the profile, the Foundation Stage Profile .. What do you think of it?

Shirley: I don't find it easy to do. Maybe it's controversial but I don't like the profile. I find it as EXTRA work at the top of what we do. And it is quite a LOT of extra



work which I am doing here now, profile work, in my holiday. Em .. and again I can see the need for something like that to make us all the same, but I know that from the assessments I do I know where the children are, and then I have to do this on top for the government. And there is a necessity for it .. OK, but I don't like doing it (laughs). I just find it takes of my time when I could be doing other things for the kids. It's there and I have to do it so I do it. I think it is an extra work. And it doesn't tell me any more about the children than I know with my own assessments.

Omayya: It is not beneficial for you in your work with the children?

Shirley: No, No, but the government needs to know these things em so for me .. it's time wasted, for me and the children, but the government wouldn't see it like that.

Omayya: Are there other things you don't like or you like about the government intervention in the early years?

Shirley: Em (pause).

Omayya: Do you think, for example, that they don't know exactly what's going on in schools or something like that?

Shirley: No, I think they have em advisers who, you know, are consultants who have been in early years. So I think they do understand how nurseries work through play and em what they need, but the government is very different to working with children. They need statistics. They need records of how things are working. "Is it the best way forward for children? Is it the best way to have teachers in or nursery nurses?" So they NEED all these statistics and I can see why they need that? It's just personally .. it doesn't help me, so that's why I am not very happy with the profile.

Omayya: What are the factors, the things that help you and other staff to work well with the children?

Shirley: They have em a network of consultants and advisers where you can call on them if you have difficulties with something or you want to em help something develop. At the moment we want to develop our outside area, so I would contact advisers to come in and give ideas and help to go through that. Em .. we have the school welfare officer who is very supportive at this school and with problems with families and children, and who would support teachers and families. Of course there's also the head who tries to support all the teachers (laughs), and parents .. some parents

are very supportive. Em only a few in this school, unfortunately, that's the way things are, but some parents are very supportive. ( )

Omayya: What about training? Do you usually go for training?

Shirley: Yeah, that's through the advisers and consultants when there are training programmes. Em .. we have some in-school things like the computers and smart boards, things that are updated so often that we need to keep up to date with that. Em .. if there are any new things, any new ways of doing things, we train. Em .. there are so many different training things.

Omayya: Do you find them useful in your work?

Shirley: Yeah.

Omayya: The training is usually for you and for the nursery nurses or just for you?

Shirley: Yeah, for nursery nurses as well and for classroom assistants here in this school?

Omayya: Outside the school, do you go for training courses?

Shirley: Yeah. We do training in school and with education authority. It can be in different areas, but we do go out to schools to train as well which is always very good because you meet people from other schools and get of their ideas and how things have been there and how they change things. It is good to actually go out to meet other people from different schools. It's good to go sometimes to a big school and see how they deal with much bigger numbers or em .. I mean I have also been to small schools ( ), smaller than here, so it's good to see how other people deal with problems that you have with routines and working things between three people.

Omayya: Now how do you feel about your work in the early years?

Shirley: I LOVE work in early years. I LOVE being with the children. I HATE all the writing (laughs) that I HAVE to do, and I absolutely love being with the little ones because they just, I don't know, they have so much that they can break your day up with just the little things that they do. It is really .. I love coming into work to see them. But I work very long hours writing. Em .. that's the one part of the work that I just don't like. I do it but I work probably sixty, sixty-five hours a week and that affects my family. I don't know. As for home-work balance, my balance is very down; one side overcomes the other (laughs).

Omayya: You take work home?

Shirley: Yes, yeah. Ah I mean it is .. it's a LOT of writing now: planning, justifying, assessing.

Omayya: You need to do that alone or nursery nurses also participate in-

Shirley: -No. Nursery nurses em .. we have a meeting once a week for half an hour to see what's happening next week and if they have ideas, but I am responsible for all the planning, the writing, the assessment. I am responsible for all of that, so that's down to me. They are not PAID a salary to do that. They are paid by the hour, and their hours are working with the children, so it's not up to them to do that. Em .. but I do enjoy working with the little ones. It is a lot of fun .. a lot of hard work .. em but just seeing how they progress and seeing how they do things .. it's wonderful. I do love the job, but I don't like the hours I have to put in to do it.

Omayya: Do you think that people from outside early years or in other stages in the school or even the government, do you think they realise that you work hard?

Shirley: I think within the school, yes because we are a small school. We talk about, you know, all the work that we do, and we all have to work hard because it is a small school. Everything is shared only between a few people. I don't know if people outside of education, outside of the actual school know how many hours are put in. I know parents don't because if I am still here until six o'clock which I am most nights and I am going out of the door, and when there are parents there, they will say, "What are you still doing here?" But that's my working day. I get here at half past seven in the morning and leave at six at night. That's my normal working day. The children are here from nine till three, and I stay to do my work. Then I work on Sunday at home to get the planning for the following day. So .. em the hours are long. But I love the middle bit, the work with the children. That's the good thing.

Omayya: Do you think that teachers and nursery nurses who work with young children in the Foundation Stage .. do you think that they are appreciated as others who work with higher stages?

Shirley: Em .. I think by some parents they are. Some parents of the little ones appreciate. They come in in the school and see. Probably the outside .. em they don't think that nursery teachers work very hard. We just play. That's it. We just play all



day and then go home and have our tea (both laugh). So I don't think people do realise .. outside of education, I don't think they realise how much work goes into the play, and how much you have to do to get that right. I don't think it is seen or appreciated. But parents who bring their children in see what you are doing. I think that is appreciated.

Omayya: Are there any other difficulties that you and the nursery nurses here face in your work in the Foundation Stage?

Shirley: Em .. there is never enough money to buy resources or for trips out. Money is always a problem. We always try to raise money to get more equipment. If we want to go on a trip outside somewhere, we need to hire a bus, which is about £300. Our parents in this area .. a lot of them are unemployed, so they can't contribute towards that. So money is always a problem. Em .. another practitioner in here would be good, another pair of hands, but that's money again. So I think most of it, most of the problems are down to what you can afford. There is a limited amount of money to keep this running, and if you want any more than that you've got to earn it yourself, so ( ) we do try to get money from other sources and that's an extra thing you have to do on top of the teacher.

Omayya: You told me that the nursery nurses don't do as much work as you because of the pay they are given-

Shirley: -They are not qualified em .. as a teacher. They haven't been qualified in how to plan, how to assess. I mean they have done some, but not to the standard as a degree level. So their training is different to mine. Therefore, I'm paid to do that, to do the planning and to assess the children. Their input is very valuable, but that's very informal in here. We sit and talk about where things are going: "Is that working? If that's doing well, can we develop that? If it doesn't work well, how we're going to change it." So it is all very informal, but I write it down and I do all the formal writing and assessments, but their inputs are obviously very valuable. They're working with the children as well, so they know what's working with them. We discuss it together, so it's always a very informal CHAT about things but it's up to me to make final decisions on what's going on.

Omayya: Is there anything you like to say? Anything I haven't asked about but you like to say .. about working with young children?

Shirley: Em it is a lovely job. It's a very REWARDING job, but it is very long hours and people don't see that.

Omayya: Why do you think it's very rewarding? Why do you love it?

Shirley: I think it is just the joy of working with the little ones. Em .. you see how they progress and how they develop, and you think well I have a little bit input to that. It just makes you feel good inside. You know you're helping a child to start their education from the very beginning of their formal education. If you get it right here with the little ones, then it tends to follow through in the older classes. Em .. I just like to think that I have had some input there. It's .. it's good when you go home thinking that they've done well and their mums are really pleased with them. It is nice to go home thinking that, but then you've got to get your pen and pencil and start writing it down (laughs). That's the down side.

Omayya: What about time? Do you find time to do everything you like to do with the children?

Shirley: No, no, there's never enough time. Em I mean with children we do as much as we can, but time wise again because there is so much writing before and after, so our energies are wasted on the writing I think. I think within the classroom it is a long enough day for little ones to be here from nine to three because it is full time nursery, so that's probably long enough for any little one to be away from their family. Em probably it's a long enough day for them. Em .. but sometimes you think I could have done with a bit of extra time for that.

Omayya: You said that you deal with the children as individuals and every child is different. How do you deal with the children you have here especially those who have problems or difficulties or anything like that?

Shirley: You mean difficulties with the language particularly?

Omayya: With the language or any aspect.

Shirley: We have a lot of children with English as a second language, which in nursery is not a problem because they want to play with each other; they want to talk, so children DESPERATELY want to learn English together so that they can talk

together. We use a lot of signs and actions, body language, to help them understand what we are saying, pictures and objects. It is not a problem in the nursery. When it becomes a little bit more formal in reception when you are doing letter sounds, numbers, games, it is slightly more difficult, but again we use lots of objects, pictures, things like that. Further up in the school it is more difficult if children don't have English because a LOT of work relies on writing and reading. If they don't read and don't speak English, it is very difficult for them. Other problems, we have children with different learning abilities, children with special educational needs. Again, every child is individual and we go with whatever appropriate to them.

Omayya: So what kind of activities do you prepare to cater for different needs?

Shirley: Maybe a child has problems with speaking. We have quite a few children with delayed speech, so we do games that make just sounds, not words. It might be farm animal games and we copy the sounds of the animals. We have games where we have to say something and repeat it back songs just to try to get them confident to use voices. And maybe a child who find it hard to hold toys and manipulate pens and pencils, so we do things with them in the sand, in the water, large scale movement before they start coming down to the small scale things such as picking up beads, so we try to focus on their problems. ( ).

Omayya: Do you usually plan these activities or sometimes the children do things by themselves?

Shirley: Well, some will be planned particularly to help that child, em probably within a group so the children are doing that activity which is specific to that child that you are trying to help in that particular time. Other times things are out for free play, so children will go to and you think, "Oh, he needs support there". So you move towards that to support that child and help them to develop from there. So it depends on what's happening within the nursery; where that child is; what he has gone to. Sometimes it's free and other times it's planned.

Omayya: What about the outdoor area? Do you use it a lot?

Shirley: Yes, it is used MOST of the day. Every day from about half past nine in the morning the doors are open to the outside area where there are climbing frames, grass base for football. We have bikes out. We take out toys, building toys, trains, train sets,



and there is a chalkboard on the wall so that they can write there. We paint out there in summer. We do the garden, so we TRY to go out as much as possible. I think because children today don't have a lot of outside play areas. Em .. when I was young, we went out and played in the street because there wasn't a lot of traffic then. But children now are either in the house or with mum holding hands. They don't get much to roam around as they like.

Omayya: What about the space, outside and inside?

Shirley: We are lucky here. We have a big space. Space is important. If you have a small space you can still deliver a good nursery and reception curriculum, but we are very lucky that we have got a lot of space here that we can do a lot of different areas, and the outside area is quite a good space as well for them. Em .. I mean a lot of nurseries have a small yard, just a tiny yard for the children whereas we have quite a big outside area.

Omayya: Do you usually evaluate your work with the children .. the activities you do?

Shirley: Yeah. That's sort of a daily and weekly thing. You would try to assess whether a particular activity worked to get the objectives that you wanted. And again I would jot down on the planning, daily or weekly planning, that this worked well and we could develop it to this, or this didn't work BECAUSE .. and I put down why I thought it didn't work. I would note that down in my planning, so I would know when we plan something similar again, I could refer back to that, or perhaps I would note down that the children didn't reach the objective in this because I need to track that with them.

Omayya: And you would do this by yourself or with the nursery nurses?

Shirley: Usually I do it by myself or if it is an activity that they've been involved with me, I would talk to them. I'm also evaluated by my head who, you know, reads my planning every week. I could talk to her if there is any problem with something or if I need to put in more in one particular activity. The school has targets that we have throughout the school each half term, and it might be speaking and listening that we need to put extra value in that term or it might be calculations that the school is trying to push that term up. We need to put more value in that. So my work is evaluated by my head and adviser, and teachers sometimes come in to watch. We watch each other

as well to see how we are doing. There is a lot of evaluation of myself. Sometimes you may get things wrong basically so it is good to have other people watch you and to be able to talk to. ( )

Interviewee: Yvette (Nursery Nurse)

Qualifications: NNEB

Teaching experience: Fourteen years in nursery

Age: Fifty years

Omayya: At the beginning tell me, please, about your teaching experience. How long have you been teaching?

Yvette: I've been in the nursery for fourteen years now I think. Em .. before that I had my own family and then I retrained as a nursery nurse at Newcastle College. I did two years intensive course at college and did the international diploma in nursery nursing. I've got two grown up children. My daughter is a teacher. She has been teaching for five years. My son is at university now doing a first degree ( ). Em .. I've always worked with older children in the past but I've changed to younger children because I like the idea of being at the bottom of the ladder. It sounds bad, but it's not really because children are like sponges at this stage. Whatever you speak to them about, they take it into their brains and they .. it's a MAGIC experience watching the children learning. Before being a nursery nurse, I did play schemes in youth club work so I was a youth worker with the more mature children like thirteen to twenty-year olds em .. and the play schemes with eleven to fifteen-year olds. Em .. but I wanted to work in a nursery because as I said the children are more receptive in the nursery and they LEARN without realising they're learning. When you're at school with older children they don't seem to want to sit and learn whereas in a nursery they just learn automatically because it's an everyday experience for them.

Omayya: Since you have a good experience in working with children in the nursery, in the Foundation Stage, tell me about your practice. How do you support children's learning and development?

Yvette: I think in the nursery - all nurseries are not the same - in our nursery there are three members of staff: two nursery nurses and one teacher. The three of us have planning meetings every Thursday night. We plan and we have to go through the curriculum to cover it and we have our early learning goals that we follow. We need to



follow them and we need to record and assess. We have modeling. We have play dough. We have paint. And we all have our own groups that we assess, so we work with thirteen children each. Em .. when the children come in, it's more the social side of things, the social skills that we are more interested in with the children, getting them to interact with other children of their own age. They might not have any peers at home and this is their first experience of learning to share and cope with a bigger group of children. So we're there to support them in that way, in the social side of things. Em .. we're also there to teach them early reading skills and early writing skills, knowledge and understanding of the world. As I said, it's a cross-curricular thing. And we are there as .. We're more or less their PARENTS once they come into nursery because a lot of them aren't used to being away from their parents and we are here to take care of them. We give them pastoral care as well as teaching them different skills that they need to do.

Omayya: How do you do this kind of teaching of reading, writing, social skills? How do you do it?

Yvette: A LOT of the social skills are done INFORMALLY at the table like language and literacy which you do every day anyway because you're using the language to speak to the children. They like to look at things and in the nursery we have a lot of labels on a lot of things .. on the drawers, papers, their names. They'll pick that up. A lot of children are very good at picking up initial letters of their names and such like, so we talk about that with them and that's all done at the tables where we do construction work and art work. Mathematically we talk about colour, shape, and we are actually talking to the children and children come back with their life experiences. Even though they're just four, they've still got a lot of life experiences from their parents who bring them to the nursery. Em .. ( ) We have groups of children. There are twenty-one in a group and nineteen in another group and this is when sometimes we do our FORMAL side of teaching. We don't actually sit them down as you would do in a classroom and teach to the children. We will sit and interact with the children, maybe do something more on the physical side rather than mental, you know, tell stories, talk about life experiences and things like that.

Omayya: What kind of activities do you find more effective in working with children?

Yvette: Personally I LOVE art and I find that you can get a LOT out of art because you're talking about colour; you're talking about change, and shape. You get a LOT out of that and in the nursery we don't use books as such like you would do in main stream school. Whatever they do we put their art work on the walls and that's how we show their work, and they really seem to get a lot out of that rather than just sitting down. In here they're FREE to choose whatever activity they'd like to do apart from group time when we have the larger groups.

Omayya: So you plan some activities and children choose some activities?

Yvette: Yes. Every Thursday we have a planning meeting because you have to have your weekly planning and then medium term planning which they call half-term which is for about six weeks and then long-term planning for like twelve weeks. Every three months we do that.

Omayya: Do you write down this planning?

Yvette: It's all written down and typed up on computer .Yes.

Omayya: Who usually does this: the teacher or all of you?

Yvette: We all do it. We all have a planning meeting on a Thursday night, the teacher and the two nursery nurses and we know what we have to do. This term we're doing about spring, so because of our experience in the nursery, the teacher and myself, we've had a lot of experience with children .. we're specifically trained to work in early years, so we know what we want to get out of the children, you know, by motor skills or cognitive development, whatever you want to do. So we look in the books and see what we have to get out of them for that term, what age and stage of development they're at and then we write that down and then \* who is the teacher, types it up on the computer and it's printed out for the following week.

Omayya: The training you had, you said it's specialised in early year. Did you find it helpful to you in your work?

Yvette: Yeah, that's what we're trained for. Yeah, very much so. I think nowadays I don't know if the courses are all the same because we do get a lot of students who don't necessarily KNOW what early years work is all about. They seem to think that coming into nursery is just playing with the children.

Omayya: What were the training things that helped you more when you started work?

Yvette: Em .. well to be honest we could do with refreshing our training sometimes but it was to do with cognitive development because when I trained we did sociology, psychology, maths and history. We covered the whole range of the curriculum when we did our training for TWO FULL YEARS. Em we did have a little placement, but not a lot. Most of it was at college. But I think that's changing now because we get a lot of young girls in who are doing like .. I'm not sure what they call the schemes that they're doing now, but they're not necessarily trained as nursery nurses. I don't think .. em but I'm not sure what it is. As nursery nurses, \* the other nursery nurse here and I are TRAINED to work with sort of nought to eight years even though we work with three to four-year olds.

Omayya: Do you usually go for training courses or something like that?

Yvette: We do. We are offered courses but NOT as many as the teaching staff. We seem to .. it's all to do with funding, you know. There aren't as many courses for nursery nurses although our head likes us to go even if it's for teaching, for teachers. Sometimes she says that we can still go in those training courses.

Omayya: And do you find these in-service training courses helpful?

Yvette: Yes. I've just done a course in music and that was fascinating so I like doing things like that.

Omayya: If you have a chance to attend many training courses, will you like to do that?

YC: YES, yes, as long as it's relevant to nursery because we have curriculum meetings with the school, and a lot of it is not relevant to nursery age children. A LOT of people don't realise what early years involve, you know. Em .. they think it's just playing, and it is not until you have your OFSTED inspection when you have to explain exactly what it is you do, how much of it is actually planned and what you are actually doing because we learn through PLAY. That's the prime objective in the nursery.

Omayya: Do you feel that the staff working with the other stages in the school also think that you are just playing?

Yvette: YES, yes, I do (smiles).

Omayya: How do you feel about this?



Yvette: I'm not very happy. Well, it's quite funny because sometimes .. At the moment our teacher is actually away, so we have to have supplying, and the first thing that people from higher up in the school said, "Oh we're not going to nursery because they touch you." And because of the close contact that they can find in the early years, you know, and the panic of it. You know they are not used to the physical contact that early years children have for staff. And they don't like the idea that you don't do this, this, this at certain times. You know it's not STRUCTURED. Em .. and I don't think they realise how tiring it is in early years because you are CONSTANTLY talking from quarter to nine in the morning until quarter past three in the afternoon. That's your job. You talk constantly to the children because that how they feed back to you and you feed to them. I think it's much more physical and mental job than in main stream education sometimes.

Omayya: Do you find the workload heavy, whether it is paperwork or practical work with the children ?

Yvette: Yes, it can. I mean I'm nearly fifty now (laughs). I'm not as strong as I used to be. I'd rather work face to face with the children any day than do the paperwork. I think the paperwork to me is not very important because you can't .. although you've got the personal, social skills on reports and things, you can't write .. for instance we've got a little girl who started in November, and she SCREAMED every day for two months, just came and cried and screamed and, you know, she's a lovely little girl. Now when you look at her NOW she comes and she's very confident. She's very happy. She mixes with any adult who comes here.

Omayya: How did you deal with her?

Yvette: You just give a lot of support. And you are there all the time you know. It's like .. Oh God, how did we do it? It's funny because it's like automatic. You just do it. You're not necessarily trained to do that you know. Em .. she needed support and caring and she needed to know that once her mummy had left her, her mummy was going to come back and pick her up. A lot of children in this area and a lot of other areas might not have that family support or that caring system, so you ARE their main carer from quarter to nine to quarter past three.

Omayya: Do you find it difficult when you have children from, let's say difficult families or families who have problems-

Yvette: -To be honest, you see, I am the type of person who prefers to work with children like that because you get a lot of .. job satisfaction out of it. You see those children bloom (becomes emotional) .. It's a MAJIC. It's the most magic feeling to see the child coming in who may have been abused or .. you know because we do get that .. who may have been left or chopped in front of a television or whatever. And you see these children if you are talking about a certain subject, suddenly the little eyes open wide and like "waw is that what happens?" It's just the feeling that you get inside. I must admit that I prefer to work with, as I would call them, little villains than with children who are from the upper middle class families, who know everything and they have got no social skills necessarily. They might know all of the colours, all of the numbers, all of the shapes, but they don't necessarily have the social graces where they would listen and respond you know. But that's my personal feeling. I love to work with the little villains who you have to break (laughs).

Omayya: What about the families, the parents, do you find them supportive?

Yvette: Very supportive. You do find .. sometimes you find the middle class parents would rather go and speak to the teacher, and sometimes you find the other parents would speak to anyone. If there's an adult in the nursery, they speak to that adult because they know that they are loving and caring towards their children. I think if they know their children are happy, then they are happy with you and you can be the BEST friend with the biggest people in the city.

Omayya: Do you do home visits?

Yvette: No, we don't.

Omayya: Do you arrange meetings or sessions, things like that for the parents?

Yvette: We do have meetings. I mean we've got an open situation where the parents come in in the morning and we can talk to the parents because there are three of us. It gives like two of us could be with the children and one could be speaking with a parent. We have parent consultations twice a year, but we are always around to talk anyway which is a good thing about the nursery. ( ).

Omayya: Let's now talk about something else if you like to talk about it of course. I don't know. It's up to you. I know that the nursery nurses' pay is not high. How do you feel about that?

Yvette: It's not adequate when you think of .. I think we are very lucky in our nursery where we do work VERY WELL together. There is \* the teacher who is the same age as I am and there is \* the other nursery nurse who is slightly younger. We've all got the same thing in mind, I think, to work towards the same goals to bring the children on. But sometimes I do get a little upset at times when you think about the hours and the work that we do, the fact that sometimes a teacher could maybe get twice or three times the pay that we get for doing the same work. I do .. I know I shouldn't do that because I LOVE my job. Even if I got LESS, I would still do it although I would love more naturally, but .. em it is a bit upsetting ESPECIALLY sometimes I think you find that they might just send a member of staff from higher up in the school, and they are just like another body in the place. They haven't got a clue what's going on. We end actually teaching them what to do in the nursery, you know. You think, "well, they are getting three times more than what we are getting, but we are telling them how to work in here" you know. It DOES DEFINITELY get to me sometimes (laughs).

Omayya: Will this affect your feeling towards your work or anything like that?

Yvette: Oh, no, no. I think it's just one of those situations where that's what you do. I mean I would go and strike tomorrow about it which I have done in the past. But I don't think we are actually going to be able to do it because we've got .. what they are doing now they are training classroom assistants, which is the pain of my life, I'm sorry. But I don't agree with classroom assistants because they could end up taking a classroom of children and they are looked on as somebody who has had many weeks of training compared to two years full-time training as a nursery nurse where you actually trained to EDUCATE because we are all educators. I don't like the idea that classroom assistants – I feel sorry for them anyway because they don't get paid during the holidays; they are term-time only whereas at the moment I'm getting paid on an annual basis. I just think if they want to do that kind of job, if they want to teach, they should train to be teachers because at the moment you get classroom assistants who can take a full class, and they haven't got the training to do it. I don't think it's right. I



think as a parent I wouldn't be happy if I knew my child has been taught by someone who's just done twenty weeks training.

Omayya: What about the career structure of nursery nurses?

Yvette: (Laughs) We don't have. I mean I'm on the top of my level now and I won't be able to go any higher than what I am now, so you get an annual sort of rise but very slight, but career wise I can't do anything else.

Omayya: So what's your rank now if you are on the top-

Yvette: -Just a nursery nurse, just the same as anyone else. I can't go any higher, not as a nursery nurse. I mean I could go if I was not nearly fifty .. go and learn to do a teaching job, to become a teacher, but I'm PROUD of my job. I LOVE my job as a nursery nurse, and I am a qualified person as a nursery nurse, and I think it should be recognised because we are trained to do a specific job.

Omayya: What are the things that help you to work well with the children?

Yvette: Do you mean personality or training?

Omayya: Well, anything .. personal qualities, for instance.

Yvette: I think you've got to have a very open mind. Em .. you've got to have a very good sense of humour. You've got to be very fast sometimes because you may end up being spattered or hit or kicked or whatever (both laugh) so you've got to be quite physical. Em .. I think you've just got to enjoy life, to be honest with you, in the nursery. I think if you are not bright and cheerful then the children are going to draw from that. They can FEEL. If you haven't got a happy view of life, then the children can be depressed at the end of the day you know. So definitely you've got to have get up and go.

Omayya: Other things that help you in your work?

Yvette: I think the idea of working as a group really HELPS because you get a chance to talk to the members of the staff that you work with. We are all completely different personalities, so you could have one particular child who might sort of go in the wrong way and you know that there's another member of staff there who would help. That's the good thing about working in a team because there are three of us who are all different, thank God, and we help each other out in that way. And we have someone to speak to at the end of the day because sometimes we do have families that need extra

care, extra help and it's VERY very emotional time, and you need someone where you can't tell your husband or partner about it, but the friends you work with you can talk to, so you get their support as well.

Omayya: Do you invite advisers here to come to help and to give advice?

Yvette: We actually don't. I'm trying to think the last time we had an adviser in the nursery. It was an awful long time ago.

Omayya: Why? .. Is it because of money, for instance or -

Yvette: - I've got a feeling it is to be honest with you.

Omayya: Do you think advisers may be helpful if they come?

Yvette: I don't think I've ever seen an adviser in nursery, to be honest with you. I don't think there are any. If there are, they're hiding somewhere (both laugh).

Omayya: OK now let's talk about the other side. What are the difficulties that you face in your work in the Foundation Stage?

Yvette: The difficulties are the emotional side as well because I'm a very emotional person, so if .. It's knowing where to stop. You know you can get so involved but then you have to be very strong with yourself and stop yourself getting too involved. It's .. I find it difficult where you are not meant to have favorites which is very very difficult because when children work around you, you've got to treat everyone the same. Sometimes I find that difficult because you do get .. I like the little villains ( ) and I feel a little extra protective towards them you know. I find the emotional side of things too hard. It can be a bit hard sometime. I also find, not as much now but in the past, it's been the support of the main stream staff as well because they don't necessarily understand what goes into early years education, so they don't always know what to expect from the children. Em .. sometimes they come in and I think they expect to have a piece of paper and a pencil so they can do the ticky chart and they can write down exactly and put everything into boxes, whereas you don't work like that in the nursery. You know you can have as much planning as you like, but if a child sort of .. for instance, we're doing something about spring. If a child suddenly starts to talk about something else, you can't say, "I'm sorry we are not talking about that; we are doing about this." You just go with the flow because that how they feel easiest. So that

could be one of the difficulties for someone else because they might not necessarily know how it works.

Omayya: What's your own philosophy about working with children in the early years?

Yvette: (Laughs) (Pause) On the personal side I find the nursery as really exciting because as I said the children are like little sponges and they take it all in, and you can see them actually .. the brains click into place. And you know they are learning new things every day and that helps you learn as well, and I just really love and enjoy early years education.

Omayya: What about government intervention in the early years? You know the introduction of the Foundation Stage .. What do you think of it?

Yvette: I think it's very important. I think .. em in the North East of England we've always been extremely lucky with early years education because we've always had nurseries in the North East for as long as I can remember we've had nurseries but not so much down South where you have to have private nurseries. You have to pay for nursery education. Em so we are very lucky especially in Newcastle because we've got a good number of nurseries in this area.

Omayya: What about the government publications such as the Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage?

Yvette: Well. I agree with it in a way because anybody who needs to know the basics, who needs to know what you are working towards .. but the only thing I've got about is that they tend to bring out these booklets every sort of two or three years. They are all leading to exactly the same thing. They just use a different language, and it is when you are filling in your reports and things it's using that language. But it's ALL exactly the same as we've been doing for years.

Omayya: Do you find it restrictive?

Yvette: It can be VERY restrictive. It can be because early years should be free and easy and learning through play rather than having to do this, this and this BY this stage because they could end being failures at four which I think is really bad, you know, when you look at statistics and things. I think children should be allowed to learn at their own pace rather than having to learn BY a certain stage.

Omayya: So how do you assess children?



Yvette: We actually have assessment papers that we do. We've actually got booklets. Each one of us in the nursery has got her group of children that we assess. We've got objectives in these booklets where they say, you know, by this stage they should be able to do this or that or whatever. They should know the numbers up to ten; they should know the colours, the basic shapes and so on. We assess by observation. We always observe the children.

Omayya: You fill in observation sheets or you write notes?

Yvette: A bit of both. I find it better, personally, to write notes and then fill in the sheets because I don't like sitting one to one with a child ( ) because you don't get the TRUE aspects of how they are learning you know. I'd rather WATCH a child and LISTEN to a child because that's the way I am personally.

Omayya: Do you do the Baseline Assessment in this school?

Yvette: Yes, we have the Baseline Assessment, yes.

Omayya: Do you find it good for assessing children?

Yvette: It's nice to know where they start, but you can't get the personal, social, emotional side of things in Baseline Assessment.

Omayya: What about the profile, the Foundation Stage Profile?

Yvette: We fill it in at the end of the year. We don't do it at the beginning.

Omayya: Do you find it difficult to fill in the profile?

Yvette: It's just layered language you know. I mean you've got statements there where you cross them off and you think it's SO IMPERSONAL. It's .. I just don't agree with it I'm afraid. But I know people need to have that information, but personally I don't like it.

Omayya: Do you benefit from it in your work with the children?

Yvette: I don't personally. I don't but maybe reception might, but I don't personally because I think if the children are happy and they can talk to you, they can hold a conversation, they come in to nursery happy and they go home happy, then I think I have done my job.

Omayya: Do you have children with English as an additional language?

Yvette: Yes, yes.

Omayya: How do you deal with them?

Yvette: I think dealing with them is easier at this stage, three and four, because as I said they are like little sponges, so they're taking a lot of language in. We have three children; two whose English has REALLY progressed really well because they just pick it up. They are hearing all of the time.

Omayya: What about their parents? How do you deal with their parents?

Yvette: Em .. it depends on the parents. Sometimes we find it a little bit difficult and we need to get an interpreter which has happened in the past, but most of the time the parents are here. They have been working here or they are at university here or college or whatever so they have got a very good use of English language.

Omayya: Do you usually evaluate your own work with the children?

Yvette: Em (Pause).

Omayya: Do you think, for example, of what you have done, how to improve it, whether it has gone well or not?

Yvette: Oh, yes. As nursery nurses we are not evaluated in that way. We'll do it ourselves personally if you think that a task hasn't gone the way that you wanted to then you change it. Em .. I think teachers are assessed on a more regular basis. Em .. they are assessed by the peers or by the management or whatever, but we are not as nursery nurses.

Omayya: You are not assessed by anyone?

Yvette: Not that I have noticed, no (both laugh). We do our own assessment. Just as I said if something goes right you think, "that's great I'll do that again". If it doesn't, then you don't do it.

Omayya: Do you record this?

Yvette: No, there are no actual sheets, ticky sheets where you actually write it down.

Omayya: Now, how do you feel about your work?

Yvette: I still love it. BY the end of July, I'll be physically and mentally exhausted like everybody else, but I think in early years you've got to LOVE doing the job to be able to do it.

Omayya: Do you find the time enough to do what you like to do with the children?

Yvette: Em .. in a whole yes, yes. It's not too bad because they are here from quarter to nine to quarter past three, so that's not too bad. I mean sometimes there are some

things that you want to carry on them, some things that go really well so that we don't want to tidy up and do groups about something else, but you know you just have to stop.

Omayya: What about the PPA time?

Omayya: The teachers have PPA time, but we don't (laughs). Sorry, that's another sour spot. Because the three of us all work together as a team, I feel we should have planning time as well instead of spending time on the Thursday night on a voluntary basis to do the planning. Em .. the teacher gets her PPA time on Friday afternoon but we don't. I think we should have PPA time. If they expect us to work as a team then they should give us planning time as well (laughs). I think if we are expected to work as a team and if we are expected to work together and parents don't see us as any different to the other members of the staff, then we should be expected to have PPA time instead of having to do the planning in our own time.

Omayya: Here do you feel that parents, the school and also from the government's point of view, do you really feel that they see nursery nurses as different from other staff?

Yvette: I think they do in a way. I don't think they KNOW what nursery nurses do because as I said earlier they just think that we are here to PLAY. They don't know the training we have been involved in prior to actually taking on the job. Em .. some people do because they have been in nursery and they have children in nursery, so they do realise what it entails, but em .. not always, not always.

Omayya: Whose responsibility you think is this?

Yvette: I think it's everybody's to be honest with you. I think it's our fault as well as other members of staff you know. It's no one person's in particular, but I'm still proud to say I'm a nursery nurse and that's what I trained to do so I'm happy to do it.



**APPENDIX C**  
**Two Examples of Interview Summaries and  
Practitioners' Responses**

Dear Teacher,

This is a summary of your views about the following three major themes as they come over from the interview I conducted with you. Please, read the points related to each theme and answer the questions that follow. In this way I hope to ensure that I have interpreted your comments accurately.

**(1) Features of good practice in the Foundation Stage:**

**1. A well-planned curriculum that:**

- supports children's development in the six areas of learning especially personal, social and emotional development and communication, language and literacy
- is play-based
- is integrated
- is child-centered

**2. A well-planned indoor and outdoor environment that:**

- includes various activity areas
- is safe and secure
- has lots of different materials, books and toys that are accessible to the children
- is stimulating as it includes displays of children's photographs and work, and various visual aids

**3. Qualified specialised staff who have sound knowledge of how children learn and different teaching strategies and skills**

**4. Good interpersonal relationships among all parties:**

- The staff establish good relationships with the children
- The staff work as a team, plan and discuss everything together
- The staff involve the parents and both cooperate for the interest of the children

**5. Ongoing observation and assessment of children**

**6. Self-evaluation and performance management**

**• How accurate does the summary reflect your views? (Please circle)**

Very accurate      Accurate      Inaccurate      Very inaccurate

• Are there any additional comments you would like to make on my understanding of the features of good practice noted in the summary?

..I.....think...developing.....social, personal....and.....  
..emotional...skills...is...most...important...to...begin.....  
..with...because...without...these...skills...children.....  
..can't...access...learning. They...are...important...skills  
for young children to develop.

**(2) The factors that support/enhance good practice in the Foundation Stage:**

- 1. Specialised initial and in-service training
- 2. Enough resources:
  - Enough materials and equipment
  - Low staff-child ratio
  - Specialised advisers
- 3. Positive government intervention:
  - Introduction of the Foundation Stage
  - Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage
  - Planning, preparation and assessment (PPA) time
- 4. Parents' cooperation
- 5. Practitioners' feelings towards the job: love, enjoyment, commitment and satisfaction
- 6. Practitioners' personal qualities: patience, open-mindedness, flexibility, sense of humour and organisation

• How accurate does the summary reflect your views? (Please circle)

Very accurate     Accurate     Inaccurate     Very inaccurate

• Are there any additional comments you would like to make on my understanding of the factors noted in the summary?

.....

.....

.....

.....



**(3) The difficulties you face in your work in the Foundation Stage:**

**1. Heavy workload and time constraints:**

- Lots of paperwork
- Physical, mental and emotional exhaustion

**2. Lack of enough materials and equipment**

**3. Negative government intervention:**

- Top-down changes
- Foundation Stage Profile

**4. Children with English as an additional language**

**5. Lack of recognition of the importance of early years education and practitioners' hard work**

**6. Low pay for nursery nurses**

**• How accurate does the summary reflect your views? (Please circle)**

Very accurate   Accurate   Inaccurate   Very inaccurate

**• Are there any additional comments you would like to make on my understanding of the difficulties noted in the summary?**

I feel that point 5 is very important -  
still feel lack of recognition of importance of  
early years and how demanding it is. PPA  
time is helping a lot with work load.

**• Are there any general comments you would like to make on the accuracy of the entire summary?**

I enjoyed talking about what we do  
and sharing my ideas.

**THANK YOU**

Dear Nursery Nurse,

This is a summary of your views about the following three major themes as they come over from the interview I conducted with you. Please, read the points related to each theme and answer the questions that follow. In this way I hope to ensure that I have interpreted your comments accurately.

**(1) Features of good practice in the Foundation Stage:**

**1. A well-planned curriculum that:**

- supports children's development in the six areas of learning especially personal, social and emotional development, communication, language and literacy and creative development
- is play-based
- is integrated
- is child-centered

**2. A well-planned indoor and outdoor environment that:**

- includes various activity areas
- is safe and secure
- has lots of different materials, books and toys that are accessible to children
- is stimulating as it includes displays of children's photographs and work, and various visual aids

**3. Qualified specialised staff who have sound knowledge of child development**

**4. Good interpersonal relationships among all parties:**

- The staff establish good relationships with the children
- The staff work as a team, plan and discuss everything together
- The staff involve the parents and both cooperate for the interest of the children

**5. Ongoing observation and assessment of children**

**6. Self-evaluation, peer evaluation and performance management**

**• How accurate does the summary reflect your views? (Please circle)**

Very accurate    Accurate    Inaccurate    Very inaccurate

• Are there any additional comments you would like to make on my understanding of the features of good practice noted in the summary?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

**(2) The factors that support/enhance good practice in the Foundation Stage:**

- 1. Specialised initial and ongoing in-service training
- 2. Positive government intervention:
  - Introduction of the Foundation Stage
  - Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage
- 3. Parents' cooperation
- 4. Practitioners' feelings towards the job: love, enjoyment, commitment and satisfaction
- 5. Practitioners' personal qualities: patience, open-mindedness, flexibility, sense of humour, organisation and work experience

• How accurate does the summary reflect your views? (Please circle)

Very accurate    Accurate    Inaccurate    Very inaccurate

• Are there any additional comments you would like to make on my understanding of the factors noted in the summary?

.....  
.....The.....Foundation.....Stage.....is.....already.....  
.....in.....practise.....The.....government.....needs.....to.....  
.....recognise.....good.....practise.....,.....We.....are.....lucky.....in.....  
.....the North East with L.E.A nursery provision, but it

**(3) The difficulties you face in your work in the Foundation Stage:**

- 1. Heavy workload and time constraints:
  - Lots of paperwork
  - Physical, mental and emotional exhaustion

is not the case nationally.



2. Lack of training and advisers

3. Negative government intervention:

- Top-down changes
- Foundation Stage Profile
- More pressure on children and practitioners

4. Social deprivation and poverty

5. Lack of recognition of the importance of early years education and practitioners' hard work

6. Nursery nurses' situation:

- Low pay and no career structure for nursery nurses
- Little in-service training for nursery nurses

• How accurate does the summary reflect your views? (Please circle)

Very accurate    Accurate    Inaccurate    Very inaccurate

• Are there any additional comments you would like to make on my understanding of the difficulties noted in the summary?

Nursery nurses need to be recognised as professionals. Not all N.N.s write reports or hold consultation evenings with parents, as we do, but they still need recognition for their 2 years full time training in early years!

• Are there any general comments you would like to make on the accuracy of the entire summary?

Thank you for making an accurate report on our profession. I hope my comments have been helpful to you. I would like to wish you well for the future.

THANK YOU